

THE FOUNDATIONS OF
BRITISH PATRIOTISM

By the same Author

A HISTORY OF BRITISH CIVILIZATION
THE VICTORIAN TRAGEDY, ETC.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

BY

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If England to itself do rest but true.

Shakespeare.

Patriotism must be founded on great principles and
supported by great virtue.

Bolingbroke.

Empire is no more, and now the lion and wolf shall
cease.

Blake.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	ix

BOOK I

CHAP.		
I.	THE ISLAND ON THE WORLD'S EDGE	3
II.	IMPERIAL OUTPOST	11
III.	ENTER JOHN BULL	21
IV.	SPIRITUAL CONQUEST	31
V.	UNCOMPOUNDED UNITY	42
VI.	COMPLETION BY CONQUEST	54
VII.	NOLUMUS LEGES ANGLIÆ MUTARE	70
VIII.	WHAT TOUCHES ALL	83
IX.	CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS	98

BOOK II

I.	THE TUDOR SECRET	119
II.	THE DECLARATION OF ENGLISH INDE- PENDENCE	133
III.	THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE	151
IV.	PATRIOTISM TURNS INWARD	173
V.	AN ESSAY IN DICTATORSHIP	187
VI.	BRITAIN DEFINES HER INDEPENDENCE	203
VII.	MARKING TIME	219
VIII.	COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS	238
IX.	A NEW START	257

CONTENTS

BOOK III

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION .	269
II.	"ENGLAND WILL SAVE EUROPE" .	286
III.	REACTIONARY INTERMEZZO .	301
IV.	CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE . . .	317
V.	SOME HAVE GREATNESS THRUST UPON THEM	334
VI.	EMPIRE OR LIBERTY . . .	346
VII.	IMPERIAL FEVER . . .	356
VIII.	ON TO ARMAGEDDON	379
IX.	THE LOST PEACE	391
X.	RAGNAROK	405
	INDEX	421

INTRODUCTION

I have, in these pages, offered my infinitesimal contribution to the task of revealing Britain to herself, in the belief that an enlightened patriotism can only be built upon a foundation of self-knowledge. That I cannot help feeling to be of supreme urgency at a time when our free civilization, and all that it stands for, is threatened with imminent destruction, and when its sole guarantee of survival is in the quality and greatness of its informing patriotism.

It is a fact as patent as it is disquieting that of late years the very notion of patriotism should have come under a cloud, and that men of the most enlightenment and good will should be the foremost in depreciating it. It is no new phenomenon in England, in which everybody, of any education, knows Dr. Johnson's typically English remark about the last resort of a scoundrel, and Edith Cavell's dying message that patriotism is not enough. But that there should be any rift in the free union of spirits which is the British alternative to propaganda-drunken mass compulsion, is more than we, or our civilization at the present juncture, can afford.

In a free community, however, there can and ought to be no question of applying any other compulsion than that of the truth. And, whether we happen to like it or not, we have to reckon with the feeling, never more rife than to-day, that the sort of thing that is given out for patriotism is not fit to be touched by any decent Englishmen with the end of the proverbial barge-pole. The idea of plain John Bull strutting about in an imperial mantle, and praying God who expanded his waist-line to make him fatter yet, strikes a good many actual John Bulls as both degrading and ridiculous. Nor can it fail to occur to anyone capable of the least reflection, that this

INTRODUCTION

holy egotism of *England uber alles* is that self-same spirit to which British civilization opposes its undying negative. We may as well invite Hitler to rule over us and have done with it as convert ourselves into half-baked Totalitarians.

If I presume to cite my own experience, it is only because I am convinced that it is typical of innumerable others. I was brought up in the atmosphere of a patriotism so rumbustious and stentorian as to be simply inconceivable nowadays ; I can dimly remember the first Jubilee, and the second very clearly indeed ; my favourite literature as a schoolboy consisted in accounts of future wars from which, after an agreeably awful slaughter, the British Empire would emerge vaster and more imperial than ever. Even the South African War, which was just a year old when I went up to Cambridge, was a series of magnificent thrills, in which everything—thanks to dear old Bobs and iron-hearted K. of K.—was bound to come right in the end, though it certainly did trail off into boredom and disillusionment unspeakable before the end. But about patriotism in those empire conscious days there was no doubt or room for doubt. It meant an honest-to-God—or Satan—love for your country, right or wrong—not that she ever was wrong, to signify—and loving your country meant shouting, and going all out, and, at need, dying, for that empire on which, as we were constantly reminded, the sun never set. To doubt this, or oppose it in any way, was treason.

That crude and schoolboy patriotism did not, I am happy to say, survive the South African anti-climax. Obviously it is as well for a grown-up man to have some better reason for loving his country than that which, applied to one of his fellow-men, would be good for a criminal prosecution. And surely, for a rational being, there can be no other ground for loving anything than the fact of its being lovable, which by the most generous stretch of language does not coincide with the successful pursuit of egotism, however sacred.

INTRODUCTION

But habits deeper than thought are not easily uprooted. The years of my fellowship at King's were spent in compiling a two-volume history of British patriotism for which I ransacked all that I could of history and literature ; and looking back on it now across the gap of more than a quarter of a century, I can see that my whole attempt was vitiated by a too facile readiness to accept patriotism at its face value, and for patriots those who were most emphatic and extreme in its profession. Above all I had not ceased to identify patriotism with the cult of a British Empire, in the literal sense of the word—as if Britain were a mere empire, like so many imperial bubbles of the past, that have expanded and glittered and burst on the stream of time.

I have since come to realize that to think in this way is not to exalt, but fatally to misunderstand the nature of British patriotism. There is nothing new, and something the reverse of lovable, attaching to the idea of empire. But if it should turn out that Britain has succeeded in evolving a new form of human association as far above empire in the scale of evolution as Man is above his predecessors the giant lizards—that would provide a reason for loving her so comprehensive that men of good will could say, without any qualification, "Patriotism is enough."

I hope it may not be considered profane to apply to one's earthly country the words of Cowper's hymn, which so exactly fit the case :

When I see thee as thou art
I'll love thee as I ought.

But to talk of "seeing" something invisible to the outward sense, and developing through countless generations, is to postulate a mind's eye capable of taking time as well as space into its vision, such an organ as forms part of the indispensable equipment of a historian.

For history, as I conceive of it, is the most practical of all the arts—indispensably practical, since a people unconscious of its history is like a man who has lost his

INTRODUCTION

memory, fatally incapable of knowing whence he has come or whither he is bound. If Clio has a motto, it must surely be that of Socrates, "Know thyself"—or perhaps, as applied to peoples, it would be even more appropriately "Recollect thyself". For as the whole accumulated past of a community is summed up in its present, so does history enable it to make that past come alive in its present consciousness.

If I have erred in thinking thus nobly of history, I can only plead that I do so in noble company. The master historians, those who have made history by writing it, have built upon that assumption; it has been their function to endow their country and species with a living memory. That which we call the glory of Greece and the grandeur of Rome has been given form and permanence most of all by their historians. Rome owed her Rome-consciousness in larger measure to Livy than to Cæsar; it was Thucydides who created a vision of Athens more enduring than the Parthenon. And that which our civilization has agreed in setting apart from all others as *The Book*, what is it but a grand, co-operative history of a chosen people, and the manner of its choosing?

Yet would not that description apply to every national history worth the paper that it is written on—most of all to that of England? Macaulay writing of his Whig-revolutionary, Froude of his Tudor-imperial, Bede of his newly-Christianized England, were at one, if in nothing else, at least in this; they were holding up a magic glass in which their country, or people, might behold its own spiritual lineaments, and understand its part in the drama of world history. What in their vision may have been one-sided and even distorted only goes to show that being human, they failed to rise to the full height of their task.

Let it not be said that this is to set up an ideal of propagandist history, in the sense of fixing on a theory in advance, and writing, or cooking, the facts to suit it. That indeed is what, in Totalitarian countries, any

INTRODUCTION

would-be historian, on pain of elimination, is bound to write, and why, in those countries, history has become, like so many of the other arts, extinct.

It is an ill service to hold up a distorted mirror to man or nation. The greatness of the Old Testament is in nothing more conspicuously revealed than in the almost anti-Semitic picture that it draws of the chosen people and their heroes. Thucydides is so much the greater historian than Livy, in the fact that his Athens is shown not only in all her glory, but also in all her shame, whereas nothing is allowed to detract from the grandeur of Livy's Rome.

To talk as if the historian must needs be either a dry-as-dust or a partisan is to assume that no other burden is laid on him than that of the sedulous research worker. Research is indeed the munitioning of history, but even in these days of mechanization the whole art of war is not learned in factories. In an ideal state of things, it is conceivable that no historian would be encouraged to put pen to paper, until he had trained his mind to rise above the controversies of the market place, by however long and searching a discipline. Clio is a jealous mistress and will suffer no divided allegiance. He who comes to her service must put off his party livery and discard even his national colours—if not, the less historian he.

He, therefore, who would achieve history ought to approach the facts with an unwavering, though by no means a cold, impartiality, and allow the truth to work out its way, like the oak from the acorn, by the compulsion of its own vitality.

It is thus that I have sought to comprehend the spirit of the British non-Empire, or Commonwealth of Nations, from its crude and obscure beginnings to its present world-wide fulfilment. I have eschewed the least thought of holding a patriotic or any other brief. But I have found, as I trust I may not be alone in finding, that the more one tries to escape from patriotism, the more insistently it pursues and takes possession, by virtue of the

INTRODUCTION

truth that is in it and the realization of its unfolding significance.

For that I will leave the facts to speak for themselves, except in so far as to say that, to me at least, the message they convey is one of a hope and encouragement, never more needed than now, when, beneath the mask of everyday routine, men's hearts are beginning to fail them for fear and looking after those things that are coming on the earth ; when, as I pen these words, it is rather less than even chances that they will get into print, if at all, before the coming of the great catastrophe. It will perhaps prove to be the saving and decisive factor in world history that British civilization should have broken loose, and maintained its independence, from that of Europe ; and that it should oppose the principle of Empire and compulsion, inherited from Rome, with that of a freedom of whose full implications it is even now only in process of becoming conscious.

That it should envisage, in the light of full knowledge, the cause for which it stands, is its best chance of maintaining it. For now if ever is the saying fulfilled that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. It is not the first time that Britain has stood between a tyrant and his dream of world empire ; but now that the peril is on a vaster scale, and fraught with a deadlier menace than ever before, it is essential that she should no longer react by blind intuition, but have her own positive ideal to advance, and above all, that she should dissociate herself fully and finally from the least taint or suspicion of that to which she stands opposed—in short, that she should know her own self, that self which is the whole of her upgathered past creating a future of life, and not of creeping paralysis and death, for mankind.

I have only one thing to add. I have already exceeded the bounds of the space prescribed for me. This, I am afraid, has compelled me not only to omit a great deal

INTRODUCTION

that I feel ought to have been included, but also—which I fully acknowledge—to hurry over certain phases of British development on which the devil's advocate might understandably fasten, and in particular that darkest part of the whole story that relates to Ireland. May I plead that this has been a matter not of choice but of overmastering necessity, and beg the reader to make such allowance as he sees fit.

14th August, 1939.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

THE ISLAND ON THE WORLD'S EDGE

THERE is a very old map of the world to be seen in Hereford Cathedral, the work of a monk belonging to its attached Foundation. It takes the modern visitor some time to get his bearings on what appears to be a shapeless mass of land, interspersed with seas and oceans not much bigger than rivers, and with nothing suggesting the familiar outlines of the British Isles. It is only as the eye travels along the outer edge, and when it comes to about where seven would be on the clock-face, that it catches the familiar name of Anglia, on what is evidently intended to be an island—one of three, for it would appear that Scotland, in spite of what even a Hereford monk must have heard about border raids, is divided from the mainland by as broad a channel as Ireland itself.

In such crude fashion has the good brother contrived, by guess and by God, to convey the essential truth about the British Isles in the flat world of our fathers. They lay on its outer edge, a detached fragment of that great mainland, of which, within human times, they had actually been part. Human eyes must have beheld the most decisive event in the whole of their history, when some unrecorded gale broke through the last frail neck of chalk soil that separated the Channel from the North Sea. Human eyes can still, on a clear day, look from cliff to cliff across the strip of water that makes Britain an island.

An island, yes—but how much of an island? On the answer to that question depends, to no small extent, the course of her human history. It is one that will vary considerably in the course of ages. At one time Britain

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

seems as completely insulated as the remote Bermudas ; at another, for practical purposes, part of Continental civilization and hardly an island at all. But our Hereford monk has conveyed as much as any single picture can do of this separation, that is not a divorce, from the European land mass.

He has also shown, in a manner symbolic rather than literal, how the situation is complicated by being reproduced in miniature. For it is only England that lies like a ship at anchor, within rowing distance of the shore. But beyond, and almost pushed off the map over the edge of the world, appear Scotland and Ireland. England herself, on the fringe of Europe, has a fringe of her own, or rather two fringes, highland and island. And when we speak of England in this connection, we mean the lowlands that lie facing the Continent and once formed part of the great Northern plain of Europe, a land of potential fertility and easy contours, reaching in the West as far as Exeter and the Severn Valley, bulging northward on either side of the Pennine Chain, with a long, narrowing extension up the North-east coast.

This is the essential England, the destined home of John Bull, open equally to the immigrant and the invader, and offering no serious obstacles to their progress short of her limiting foothills. A land no less penetrable to ideas from that greater world of which it had once been part, and to a wider choice of them than a mere land frontier offered, seeing that ships might converge on her shores from so many and diverse quarters ; but a land that neither man nor influence could reach from the Continent except by taking ship across that sundering belt of sea.

By which, in days of primitive navigation, much was implied. In small and more or less open boats, every voyage was an heroic adventure, fraught with known and unknown perils, even if these were but of the storms, the fogs, and the currents of a Channel crossing. Those master mariners of the Mediterranean, who, as we know,

THE ISLAND ON THE WORLD'S EDGE

came up past the Pillars of Hercules by way of the outer Ocean, were on every occasion committing themselves to something more than an Odyssey. The percentage of those who set out for England, and if they ever arrived at all, were washed up as corpses, would probably, if it were known, be staggering.

Then, again, the amount of human freight that can be transported by these means is strictly limited. Long before there was any thought of Britannia ruling the waves, the waves themselves were able to control, if they could not prevent, approach to her shores. There could be no question of migrating hordes flooding in as over a land frontier. The peopling of England must needs have been, relatively speaking, by dribblets—ship-loads and argosies of picked adventurers. It may well have been as much by infiltration as invasion. That it was gradual and piecemeal is certain.

There were, indeed, men peopling her downland ridges while England was still joined to the Continent, but their numbers must have been exiguous, and even if their stock did not die out altogether, it can hardly have contributed anything decisive to British ancestry. For all practical purposes, it is safe to say that the English, and British, people are the product of such an age-long immigration as I have described.

Racial purity is not to be expected under these conditions. In England, especially, the most easily accessible part of the islands, and one on which the most numerous lines of approach converge, the conditions are set for a thoroughly rich mixture of blood, a confusion continually worse confounded by new arrivals, who tend to spread themselves out over the lowlands, and to drive such diehards of the old breeds as refuse to stop and mingle farther and farther back into the Highland Fringe.

Thus, the nearer we get to the English coast, the greater the number of strains that we may expect to find contributing to the general hotchpotch. For where fresh penetration is limited to such dribblets, it is

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

inconceivable that the toughest new arrivals should proceed to exterminate or drive out the aborigines in order to people the land themselves. They must come to some sort of terms of co-habitation, even if a certain section should take to the outer wilds rather than come to any terms whatever. Otherwise all these self-imported stocks, from first to last, will be merged in one cumulation of bastardy.

The only wonder is that the completed product, that is John Bull, and even its expansion into John Bull and Company, should not turn out to be even more heterogeneous. To judge by the shape of their heads, the decisive test for modern ethnologists, the people of Great Britain and Ireland vary within comparatively narrow limits, and present no such contrast of long and round as the so-called Aryans of Central Europe. The roundheads, or Alpine stocks, being essentially inland, seem hardly to have penetrated to England at all, except for the arrival on her Eastern shores of a half-Nordic offshoot, called, after their lovely pottery, Beaker folk. Otherwise, the making of John Bull is a comprehensive long-headed assortment of types ranging from little dark Iberian to big blond Scandinavian.

From an evolutionary standpoint, this affords maximum scope for fruitful variation, while avoiding any contrast violent enough to result in the gendering of half-breeds. If one may apply the language of the legendary Irishman to the typical Englishman, the most typical thing about him is his not being typical at all.

What ought to be stolid Saxons, sons of South Saxon squires, like Shelley, or Cockney tradesmen like Blake, may turn out to command more of fairy magic or ethereal mysticism than any Celt. No one can predict what sort of hereditary gene will be dominant in the composition of any given Englishman, or to what streak of ancestry he will hark back.

It might be that if Lowland England were an island, instead of only part of one, her stocks would in time get

THE ISLAND ON THE WORLD'S EDGE

so thoroughly mixed as to become stabilized at one homogeneous level. But this is prevented by the existence of those two fringes of which I have spoken. To North and West, beyond her encircling foothills, stretches an older, poorer land, whose mountainous and waste spaces offer defence rather than prosperity, a land broken up by the encroachment of the sea and the lowlands into territorial units between whose respective inhabitants there will be scant prospect of common action, against the some day inevitable attempt of John Bull to expand over the whole of Britain.

Whoever is master of England will thus be able to fall, sooner or later, in overwhelming force, on any particular section of the Fringe, with one possible exception, and that where the hill country stretches further and further back into the Northern mists. An unconquerable Scotland will mean a Britain that is less of an island than a Continent in miniature ; an England that is a land power with the curse of a land frontier.

Beyond the Highland lies an Island Fringe, with only one island likely to be of major importance ; an island that stands to Britain in much the same relation as Britain to the Continent, but with the proportions how subtly, how fatally altered ! The island so large and the continent so small ! An island easy to invade, easy to overrun ; but too big to assimilate, too far off to hold in an unrelaxing grip ; and yet too great a potential menace and too much of a stimulus to cupidity to be left to work out its own fortunes in peace ; and moreover, as if anything yet were lacking for the seeds of eventual tragedy, at a distance calculated to delay British aggression until Irish civilization has had time to strike roots too deep to be torn up by any means short of actual extermination.

Thus, though the very existence of the two fringes is pregnant with age-long strife and misery, there is the compensating advantage that the mixture of stocks is kept continually going on. With the achievement of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

easy communications and a common language, no amount of local nationalism will stop anything called English from being an English-Scotch-Irish-Welsh compound, with each element imparting its distinctive strength to the whole. It may well be that in any supreme national effort, the Welsh fire, the Scottish leaven of philosophy, the Irish quickness in the uptake, will play a leading part. For never was there a happier marriage than that which is continually being consummated between the mercurial Celtic and the deliberate Anglo-Saxon mentality, each being so exactly calculated to supply what the other lacks.

These terms, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon, are, of course, mere verbal conveniences, with no pretence to scientific accuracy. How many diverse elements are mixed and compounded in the general melting-pot of the English nature would defy computation. And even if we could make a comprehensive list, it would remain for us to distinguish between contributions of actual blood and merely of ideas and influence. For these likewise have had to be borne across the sea in ships, and subject to the conditions imposed by such means of transport.

Take, for instance, what, to a seeing eye, is about the most impressive sight in England, that of a sudden, symmetrical hill, towering above the Bath Road on the outskirts of Avebury. One must travel to those of another ancient capital, Memphis of Egypt, to find the key to the mystery. Silbury Hill is a pyramid, wrought in earth instead of stone. Whoever caused it to be erected must have been sufficiently imbued with the spirit of Egypt, under the old monarchy, to have undertaken the heroic task of raising a pyramid of his own, with the materials and labour at his disposal.

Except for the evidence of this silent witness, we know nothing whatever about him. There is no reason to assume him to have been of Egyptian blood—the probabilities are all the other way. He may never even have seen Egypt. But the prestige and influence of that mighty

THE ISLAND ON THE WORLD'S EDGE

civilization, while it was still at its living height, must have penetrated to an England that, for human purposes, consisted of its long lines of downland ridges. And we know by what long and adventurous voyages ideas must have been brought, no doubt by the Phœnician or Cretan lords of the Eastern Mediterranean.

For ideas are even more important than germ-cells, and the seaways that converge on the British Isles give scope for a richer and more varied selection of these than any land frontiers are likely to offer. It is certainly remarkable how many and erudite are the investigators who have fathered civilization in Britain on to this or that of the leading peoples of antiquity. There are advocates for Cretan, Hittite, Buddhist, Phœnician, and Mazdaic origins, all of them armed with an impressive weight of evidence. There are some, even, who would have it that the medieval legend of a conquest by refugees from Troy, led by one Brutus, is founded on fact. And it is possible that each of these claimants may have got, if not the whole truth, at least part of it.

As with blood, so with thought, the sea controls its importation. Ideas cannot seep in as over a land frontier and rise to one super-national level of orthodoxy. They must be brought, so long as books are none or few, like Christianity into the South Sea Islands, by missionary propagandists, who will have to contend with the whole entrenched force of insular conservatism. Even where an invader is capable of overrunning the whole of the Lowlands at a bound, his conquest of their civilization may be more apparent than real. It may even be that in this sphere the roles will be reversed, and instead of the islanders becoming good Europeans, the European leaven may merely come to impart a new strength or stiffening to the native idiosyncrasy.

Thus far had that most decisive event in British history, which turned a peninsula into an island, pre-determined the relationship of the island to the Continental civilization ; eccentric, but as from a common centre ;

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

provincial, but of the same spiritual ancestry. There would be no impassible gulf ; the narrow seas were not wide enough to shut anything out, but on the contrary offered a richer choice of civilizing influences than any land ways could provide. England was so placed as to be accessible and sensitive to whatever the Continent had to impart, but not so as to be absorbed or dominated by it.

The sea would, in fact, act as a sort of protective skin. John Bull would receive all that the Continent had to give, but instead of conforming to pattern, would react to each successive stimulus according to his own bent and prejudice. He would take as much or as little of European form as he chose.

If we are to grant him the exercise of a free choice in playing the cards that fate and geographical necessity have dealt him, we must conceive of him as destined for one of two alternative roles. He may develop into a sort of permanent country cousin, a dweller on the fringe of civilization, and consequently never quite a finished, civilized product ; or it may be that his very divergence from the prescribed road will lead him into some avenue of progress towards a higher order of civilization than any that has gone before.

Between these two alternatives, the needle of England's fate for many centuries continues to oscillate uncertainly. Not impossibly, it may remain a permanently disputed question which of them has actually been achieved. But when first she emerges into the light of history, it is to repudiate in human terms her geographical divorce, and be received again into the bosom of the Continent.

CHAPTER II

IMPERIAL OUTPOST

I have referred to the parting of Britain from the Continent as the most decisive event in her history, in the sense that it determined its whole subsequent course, and therefore laid well and truly the foundations on which her civilization would have to be built. Next in importance I should be inclined to place the series of conquests that for a time almost had the effect of reversing the work of nature, and depriving England of her insular status. It was as if the Continent had stretched out an arm, and drawn part of Britain into itself again. Part, but—most significantly of all—not the whole.

The great "As if", which is the lord of practical convenience, permits us to regard that very Continent as if it were one with the solid land mass of a flat world. That is how we see it displayed on the Hereford map, and it is the way it must have appeared to a Roman of the First Century, when it was decided to enlarge the Empire by taking in the new province of Britannia.

The influence of Rome has been so vital, and so lasting, that it is imperative for us to realize what it was that the Roman Empire stood for and conquest implied. A flat world is naturally conceived of as having a centre, and under the early Cæsars it seemed as if this centre had been found at Rome, in so far, at least, as its civilization was concerned. This had come about by a very simple and logical process of development. The first great civilizations of antiquity had tended to grow up along the valleys and basins of rivers, such as the Nile, the Tigris-Euphrates, the Indus, and the Yang Tse. But there came a stage when an inland sea was substituted for a river as the highway of civilized intercourse, and it became a question which of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

the peoples on the Mediterranean coast would develop the gigantic power required to master the whole of it, with its surrounding territories. Greece, handicapped by her Eastward inclination, lost whatever chance she had when fever cut short the dreams of Alexander the Great ; and it was Rome, placed as nearly as possible in the exact centre, who by annihilating her only serious rival, Carthage, at last saddled herself, though sorely against her will, with the task of expanding her sovereignty over the whole Mediterranean seaboard and its hinterland.

But to maintain effective sovereignty from a centre over vast areas of territory becomes more nearly impossible with each lengthening of the radius. It is like a bridge, the strain upon which increases in proportion to the square of its span, until the limit is reached beyond which it is unable to bear its own weight. Merely to keep her Empire in being, Rome would have to comb its resources with scientific ruthlessness ; the price of her peace would be the life-blood of its beneficiaries. Not the impact of the barbarian, but the anæmia and exhaustion of her subject humanity, would bring her down.

No way of government was open under these circumstances but that of ruthless centralization. This was clean contrary to the natural bent of the old Republic on the Tiber, with its obsessive shrinking from the concentration of power, except under stress of direst emergency, in single hands. But not even the daggers that killed Cæsar could evade the necessity for a Cæsar, the single will controlling the whole vast machinery of state. And no regrets for the old freedom could, in the long run, preserve one least check or counterpoise to the sway of this man-god, this all-powerful controller.

That machinery was the supreme triumph of the Roman genius. Neither had anything like it been seen before, nor, after its breakdown, was there any question of reproducing it on a like scale, except in so far as it may have managed to resurrect itself under a spiritual Cæsar.

IMPERIAL OUTPOST

Its workings would never have been possible without the wonderful system of communication that gave rise to the proverb "All roads run to Rome". But the essence and—so far as we can say it about machinery—the soul of that working, was the Law, that ordered system of human relationships which is the supreme contribution of Rome to civilized progress, that which, after her empire has ceased even to be a name, she continues to stand for in the eyes of the world.

"To impose the habit of peace," such was the famous definition that Rome's greatest poet gave of Rome's mission. That habit was embodied in her law, a law that, when it took final form, proved to be one of complete and unqualified centralization. The State, incarnate in its Divine Cæsar, is all in all ; the Man has no value in himself except as a smoothly functioning part of the machine, to whose controlled efficiency every other consideration is subordinate. Never was instrument more beautifully forged for the enlightened—or any—despot.

To Rome, the whole of civilization was comprised within the pale of that peace and law—within, that is to say, whatever limits might ultimately be set to her expansion outward from the shores of the Mediterranean. But it was her fate that such ultimate limits could never be attained ; she was the centre of the Mediterranean, but the Mediterranean was not central even to the world of antiquity. To the West began the ocean and to the South the desert—both within her radius of expansion ; but to Eastward the land ways stretched on and on, and even to northward her utmost resources were not equal to so comparatively modest an undertaking as the complete absorption of Britain, let alone the British Isles.

Whether she would ever advance her frontier beyond the Gallic coast line was for some time doubtful. Even Julius Cæsar, fresh from his conquest of Gaul, had failed, in two cross-Channel expeditions, to make the least permanent impression on Britain ; nor did Rome make any

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

further move for nearly a century. By that time she had gathered strength for a final leap forward, and this time the business was carried through with complete success—up to a point. The English Lowlands were overrun without any serious difficulty, though within twenty years the already flourishing Roman colony that had grown up in the wake of the legions was almost wiped out in a desperate rebellion. But after that had been drowned in blood, there was no further attempt, and soon not even the desire, to shake off the Roman yoke. Soon the Britons themselves became Romanized ; the toga superseded the native dress ; stately colonnades, luxurious baths, villas centrally heated, caused the natives, in their simplicity, to dignify their servitude with the name of civilization.¹

England had almost ceased to count as an island. As Haverfield, the greatest of all authorities on this period, puts it, these same Lowlands of hers constituted, with the opposite mainland, as far as the Auvergne and the Eifel, one huge, flat-bottomed valley, comparable to that of the Mississippi and Missouri—the valley, in fact, of the ancient Channel River, long submerged, except for its headwaters of the Seine and Somme. And now the Channel itself, with the light from the Pharos at Dover twinkling across to that at Grisnez, had become, like the Mediterranean, a glorified river ; or put it that the level flood of Roman civilization had spread over the whole Channel valley to its Highland foothills. And there it stopped.

It was not so much an English patriotism, for that had not even begun, as the very seeds and promise of it, that had been stamped out beneath the sandals of the invading legions. For among the disconnected tribes and chieftainships that had made up pre-Roman Britain, there was already perceptible some germ of an ultimate unity. There was, in something more than the physical sense, a distinctive atmosphere about ancient Britain that even

¹ As that Roman Whig, Tacitus, does not fail to point out.

IMPERIAL OUTPOST

to-day vaguely invests its memory—much too vaguely, since the two words with which it has come to be most inseparably associated, “Celtic” and “Druid”, are of all others most calculated to infuriate sticklers for pre-historical accuracy. But as with the Hereford map, there is substantial, if not literal, truth in them. Popular usage has appropriated to Celtic a wider than the strict ethnological significance. It has come to denote a quick-witted imaginativeness, a lightning transition from stimulus to action, that has very little to do with purity of blood or shape of head. As for the Druid, no doubt his has become something of a symbolic figure ; but what it symbolizes is a reputation for some sort of special and mystic sanctity, that Britain does appear to have enjoyed at the time she first came within the Roman purview. It would rather seem as if the religion of Gaul had looked to Britain for its source and inspiration. Nor is this anything to be wondered at, when we think of the holiness that must have crowned such Meccas or Romes of ancient faith as Avebury and Stonehenge—whether or not either of them had any connection with a druidic cult.

The Romans, then, when they arrived, were impinging upon a civilization that was still in process of emergence from a witch’s cauldron of stocks and cultures that were continually being added to from outside—the cream of those Ancient Britons, for example, who gave Cæsar so much more than he bargained for in the way of fighting, were newcomers from round about Belgium of scarcely a generation’s standing, hard-bitten realists with nothing remotely suggestive of the Celt in their composition. But in the popular, though not the racial sense, the Celtic spirit had already so deeply permeated British civilization that not even centuries of Roman tutelage could succeed in eradicating it.

What the Roman peace implied was a vast levelling, whereby everything that was even beginning to show signs of a distinctive individuality was flattened out of existence. It was the most perfect realization ever made

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

of the cosmopolitan ideal. Everywhere within its pale, from York to the Sahara, and from the Atlantic to the Euphrates, there was that all-embracing sameness. You might travel by those magnificently straight roads from one point of the circumference to its opposite, without perceiving any change except those imposed by nature. There was one uniform type of town planning and architecture, of dress and amusement, of outlook and way of life ; one empire, one law, one Cæsar, over a mankind standardized as it has never been before or since.

That was what, to all outward appearance, had happened to the part of Britain that Rome had succeeded in including—and in so far as she had succeeded, reduced to a mere administrative unit, without anything insular or British to distinguish it from any other province. But how far in fact, as well as appearance, had that success been obtained ?

The promenade of her legions over England had brought Rome near to the limit, beyond which expansion of her circumference would involve a strain to which her resources were unequal. It was obviously contrary to the fixed Roman instinct of carrying through every task to completion, to leave Britain, and her satellite islands, only partially conquered, with the ragged edge of a frontier, and beyond the nuisance in being of untamed barbarism. Rome would not have been Rome had she not gone all out to bring at least a united Britain within the compass of her Peace.

And, indeed, she did, on more than one occasion, put forth the utmost of her strength. What she actually accomplished was marvellous enough, and not to be repeated for a millennium ; she stormed and “slighted”, as the Cromwellians might have put it, the mountain fortress of Wales ; she even advanced her military frontier to the Forth–Clyde line, and held, in temporary quiescence the whole of the hill country to the rear of it. She even, in two supreme efforts, launched her armies into the Northern Highlands, spreading terror, and striking giant

IMPERIAL OUTPOST

blows in the mist. But she could only waste her armies in fruitless marches, and even her extension to the Forth proved beyond her power to maintain for more than an odd forty years. As for Ireland, the most ambitious of all her commanders, Agricola, had been as confident as how many subsequent would-be solvers of that problem, that he could make a contented province of her, with a few troops and a free hand ; but was lucky enough to be recalled before he had had the chance of trying.

Rome had in fact reached her limits of expansion without attaining any frontier on which she could rest in safety. Her German problem, her vast Eastern problem, even her British problem, lay beyond her powers of permanent solution ; there was nothing for it but to draw in her horns to the most defensible line her military engineers could select, and stand siege for as long as possible. Such was the compromise hit upon by that great and clear-sighted statesman, the Emperor Hadrian, whose barrier wall, from the Solway to the Tyne, can even now be seen striding over hill and dale with all the unswerving directness that typifies Rome.

Even so, her military lines were drawn far beyond the frontier of her civilization. The Welsh and Northumbrian highlands she might overawe with her garrisons, but their Celtic civilization, so long as its claws were cut, might survive as best it could in its native fastnesses.

This was a very different state of things from that which obtained in completely Romanized provinces, such, for instance, as Gaul and Spain, which had taken her impress so indelibly as to preserve it through all subsequent changes of blood and fortune. Britain, as we see her in the Hereford map, was on the edge of the world, and as far as Rome's world was concerned, half over the edge. And even in the part of it formally Romanized, one might question the depth of the conversion. Celtic influences, filtering in from the Fringe, kept the native spirit alive beneath the surface. And Rome herself, like a needy landowner who can only make ends meet by

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

living on his capital, was never able to devote proper attention to this outermost property.

When we cast our minds back to Roman Britain, we are apt to be impressed with the outward magnificence and order, so different from the semi-barbaric conditions that obtained for centuries afterwards. But as a matter of fact, no period was ever more devoid of soul or interest than those centuries of stagnation in a provincial backwater, with scarcely a history to record, even if there had been a historian to record it. Except for military pretenders, it scarcely produced anyone or anything worth writing about. Except for one or two instances where the native spirit broke through the Roman convention, its artistic output seems to have been something that it would be flattery to describe as mediocre. Nowhere was there spark or trace of creative activity in any department of life.

Even materially there was little enough to boast of, except for the inevitable roads that followed the legions as the web follows the spider. But the Romans seem to have taken the country very much as they found it, and left its enormous tracts of forest and marshland hardly diminished. The towns, standardized as they were to the most approved Roman pattern, had become ruinous and half derelict long before any enemy set foot within their crumbling walls, owing to the ruthless way in which their resources had been exploited for the upkeep of the imperial system. The country estates seem to have carried on somehow, until overwhelming catastrophe fell upon them in the middle of the fourth century, owing to the forcing of the Northern defences by a grand allied horde of barbarians who poured looting over the whole countryside. Finally, when Rome was fain to bid for a new lease of life by abandoning her pattern of a Mediterranean Empire, and shifting the centre of her power Eastward to the Bosphorus, her grasp on her overseas province relaxed ; the civil wars, that were the death agony of her Western Empire, drained away her garrisons ; and

IMPERIAL OUTPOST

without any definite break, Britain found herself with no more than the ghost of an imperial system in being, and forced to work out her own salvation with such native resources as she could muster.

And then it became apparent how much of native continuity had persisted beneath the Roman overlay. For no sooner was the imperial power withdrawn, than the Celtic civilization came flowing back quite naturally from the fringe; local chieftains parcelled out the abandoned sovereignty between themselves, and for some half a century had a very fair degree of success in stemming the flood of overland and overseas invasion.

What then are we to make of this Roman interlude in British history? Are we to write off the whole four centuries of it as a mere blank, and to think of the main stream of British life as of the Rhône, that after being apparently lost in the Lake of Geneva, emerges on the other side with no other change than the dropping of a certain amount of sediment? Or are we, on the other hand, to conclude that that long experience of Roman discipline had made a decisive difference for all time between the part of the island that had been subjected to it, and its two fringes that had remained without the law? It is quite certain that other European provinces of Rome, and most of all Britain's neighbour, Gaul, have never ceased to be moulded by her influence; as grown-up men, according to the Jesuit theory, have their characters determined by the education of their first six years. Are we to take Britain as the solitary exception to this rule, and believe that her Roman education faded from her soul like morning dew.

In the nature of things, no clear-cut or provable answer can be given. How much of the Roman system did actually survive the Romans, and persist under Anglo-Saxon auspices, is an issue capable of arousing otherwise grave and passionless experts to implacable controversy. The darkness that descends upon England between the coming of Hengist and Horsa, and that of Augustine, is

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

lit by so few and uncertain gleams, that every man is forced to rely on his own intuitive reconstruction of what it conceals.

This, however, one is able to assert from the evidence of subsequent history. England never was Romanized to anything like the extent of Gaul or Spain. But on the other hand the influence of Roman civilization has been strong enough to make a perceptible difference between the part of the island originally subjected to it—and perhaps we may extend this to include Northumbria—and its outer fringes. John Bull, that inveterate lover of compromise, has succeeded in striking some sort of balance in his own soul between the discipline of Rome and the untamed freedom of the Celt. But, true to his insular nature, he will take as much or as little of either spirit as suits his need.

But how far this partial and qualified Romanization was due to the discipline of the occupation is another question, and one, perhaps, that it does not greatly concern us to solve. For it is a complicating factor that Rome did not die, nor her influence cease to be felt after the collapse of the Western Imperium. For that collapse was but the prelude to her resurrection in spiritual form. The founder of her Empire had added to his title of Commander-in-Chief that of Supreme Pontiff. It was in this capacity that a line of spiritual Cæsars extended the power and influence of Rome over lands that the legions had never been able to subdue. And England, as before, was the part of the islands most directly subjected to that influence—and to which Rome could come back as easily as she had come originally.

What really matters is that for the centuries during which the national character was in process of formation, Roman influence would be continually brought to bear upon England, and that instead of being dominated or Latinized by it, she would react to it in her own way. By the nature of that reaction her future might be determined.

CHAPTER III

ENTER JOHN BULL

With the departure of the legions, the needle of fate swung to precisely the opposite point of the compass. Britain put off her Continental and regained her insular status—in fact so completely was she cut off from the civilization of the mainland that at one time she was believed to be the home of departed spirits. The process of adding to her already rich confusion of stocks was resumed with a vigour that seemed likely to make up for the arrears entailed by the long period of Roman peace. It was now from the East, over the North Sea, that the new arrivals came, and as usual it was the English Lowlands that had to accommodate the bulk of them.

Without going into a very disputed question of origins, let it be said that the so-called Anglo-Saxons were themselves a fairly rich mixture of North German and Danish; about as completely a psychological contrast as could well be imagined to the natives left in possession by Rome. We can best appreciate that contrast if we abandon the scientific for the popular phraseology, and speak of it as one of Celt and Saxon.

This theme of a Saxon (plus Anglian, plus Jutish) conquest is one that has given excuse for a perfect orgie of academic myth-building. In the Victorian heyday, when everything German was in fashion, the most distinguished historians did not turn a hair at the idea of these admirable supermen arriving in boatloads to effect a salutary extermination of the entire British populace as a preliminary to endowing the Promised Land with those free institutions that were supposed to be as congenial to the Teutonic nature as massacre itself. And then, when the pendulum swung the other way, it appeared

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

that there had never been a Saxon conquest at all, to speak of, but that the Roman heritage of civilization had been preserved without breach of continuity from the incursions of the few casual pirates who, penetrating up the rivers, staked out a claim in the country by taking over possession of whatever villa estates happened to be handy—with the appertaining staff and system.

All of which amounts to not much more than saying that where evidence fails, every man is free to adopt whatever story he happens to prefer. What really happened seems to have been too chaotic to fit into any simple story. The one contemporary witness we have to rely on, the monk prophet Gildas—he is of the true lineage of Jeremiah—draws a picture of unparalleled misery: cities sacked and deserted, wretched people driven from their homes into the mountains, or back by hunger to take their chance of being accepted as slaves.

It is only what we should expect to happen under what we know of the circumstances, and need not be taken to imply any abnormal Hunnishness in the Saxons, who emerge into the light of history as good-national and reasonable folk, and who, even according to Gildas, would scorn to have had more use for live Britons than dead ones. We must visualize them as companies or crews of as many stout fellows as could be enlisted under the direction of some chieftain promoter; no doubt different bands would tend to amalgamate on the snow-ball principle, and group themselves round some notoriously lucky or successful leader—a Hengist or an Aella. But even so, the numbers must have been small, and the operations piecemeal. The native inhabitants, at any rate, proved capable of disputing every inch of the ground, and putting up a fight to which there is no parallel in any other province of the Western Empire.

No wonder that, with the social order dissolving in chaos and anarchy, fighting should have been as savage as it was. With every local chief Celt or Teuton playing his own hand, it was probably only at rare intervals, and

ENTER JOHN BULL

with the rise of some supremely great leader, like the British Arthur, that there was anything like a clear-cut racial issue. The real state of things is probably best summed up in words that Tennyson put into the mouth of his version of Arthur :

All the land,

Reels back into the beast, and is no more.

It is at any rate certain that the occupation of the English Lowlands, which had been a few weeks' work for the legions, took the invaders more than a century and a half, and even so the extent to which we can talk of a plain and simple conquest of one race by the other is largely a matter of conjecture. Not the least intriguing of historical mysteries is that of the Royal Line of Wessex, from which the House of Windsor traces its descent, making its first appearance, not with Teutonic but Celtic names, the original conqueror being one Cerdic or Caradoc, which is precisely the same name as that of Caractacus, the British Prince who had led the native forces against the Roman conquest. That—however we may interpret it—is as startling as if it were to transpire that Rhodesia had been conquered for England by a Mr. Lobengula. And the mystery deepens when we find Penda of Mercia, the last great champion of Teutonic heathendom, at least as Celtic as his name could make him, and finally this same Penda joining forces with the Christian-British Caedwalla to destroy the first Christian King of English Northumbria. The most reasonable deduction would seem to be that the immemorial process of mixing up English stocks was speeded up as never before during the dark age between the departure of Rome with the legions and her return with the monks, but that the only comprehensive description that can ever be given of it is that it was an indescribable mix-up.

What does concern us is the Britain that emerges, from the seventh century onwards, into the light of Christian civilization. Here at least we have something definite to build upon. For leaving apart the insoluble conundrum

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

of blood composition, we can devote our attention to the spiritual entities that are all that really matter for history, and here we find that a change of the utmost importance has occurred. For the Britain on whose shores Hengist and Horsa had first set keel was not essentially different from that to which Cæsar himself had waded from his flagship, bearing the standard of the Tenth Legion, and which had been, in temperament and civilization, either Celtic or in process of becoming so.

But when the Supreme Pontiff was in a position to commission a second, and this time a spiritual, Roman conquest, his expeditionary band of missionaries found their problem complicated by the fact that there was now not one Britain but two ; or rather that the Celtic entity that had constituted Britain had withdrawn itself into the Highland Fringe, and left the Lowlands to the English. Such, indeed, was the spiritual gulf between these two, that the missionary Bishop, Augustine, who had found the heathen men of Kent like wax in his hands, was brought up against a wall of uncompromising opposition, when he summoned the Christian Welsh to co-operate with him in the work of conversion.

To put it in a nutshell, what the Saxon conquest amounted to was that John Bull had entered into possession of England, and that he had come to stay. And by John Bull we mean that human compound of so many and diverse elements that we call an Englishman. It was not even yet fully compounded—the Tennysonian and very insufficient formula of Saxon and Norman and Dane still lacked two of its constituents, but the essentials are there, and the modern Englishman may open his Bede or his Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and feel himself at home as he never could in the shimmer and phantasy of primitive Celtic literature. There is something he feels he can understand about this point of view of that doughty old heathen, Penda, who, though he himself killed two fellow monarchs and lost his own life in opposing the new-fangled religion from abroad, not only

ENTER JOHN BULL

allowed its missionaries to do what he no doubt esteemed their damndest among his own subjects, but even expressed a sporting contempt for those who having made their choice of the new God, proved slack in His service. There you have such a fine old conservative sportsman as you might have met at any time in the next thirteen centuries, treading the heavy soil of Penda's Midland country.

The stolid Saxon ; thick-headed John Bull ! That is the impression that he must have made, even thus early, on his Celtic neighbours so much quicker in the uptake, so brilliant in the incontinence of their imagination. Here was a fellow who, incapable of intuitive response to the call of the moment, preferred to sit down and puzzle things out, and even then, perhaps, to suspend final judgment and patch up some working compromise.

The Alfred of Little Arthur, beard on palm in front of the neatherd's fire, is no doubt a libellous travesty, but it is exactly the attitude in which folk would have expected an Anglo-Saxon King to be found at a time of supreme crisis—not in vain, if we may judge by such records of actual fact as have survived. It is thus that we see the exiled Edwin of Northumbria, when his host, Redwald of East Anglia, had received what was practically an ultimatum to kill or surrender him, seated before the palace with a heavy heart, overwhelmed with many thoughts, and not knowing what to do. It was then, in the dead of night, that the vision came to him that was doubtless the projection of his own inner self, and resulted in his eventual willingness to link his fortunes with those of the new faith from Rome.

That is typical of the way in which the English mind was beginning to work. There is perhaps no people on historical record whose vital decisions have been so largely the outcome of subconscious gestation. When minds are still sufficiently naive, they will be prone to father these uprushes from their own depths on to some visitor from outside, like some at least of the spirits who

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

announce themselves by planchette. Thus we find the poet Caedmon, then a humble brother at Whitby Abbey, going out from a banquet because he was too diffident to take his turn at singing, and, when he had dozed off, being visited by someone in a dream, who ordered him to sing and would not take no for an answer, but told him exactly what he had got to sing about, which compromised, significantly enough, the pious subjects on which he was already in the habit of composing poetry. Thus, pressed by himself to exercise the powers of which he was subconsciously aware, he was not long in achieving the fame that was his due.

That is the self-realization of a brooding mentality, a thought that moves slowly, but with the slowness of the deeper reaches of streams, "too full for sound and foam." There is a danger, and an obvious one, in such a mentality : it may stagnate altogether, and end in some dark and gloomy tarn far from the sea. And that indeed is what we do find to be the besetting weakness of the Anglo-Saxon ; left to himself he tends to get sluggish and bovine, to justify that inspired mistranslation of the nickname of his most ill-fated monarch. For Ethelred the Unready might stand, if not for any particular individual, for the pre-, and for that matter, post-Conquest, John Bull in his worst aspect, the muddler through who perpetually imposes on himself the handicap of allowing his adversary to win half the battle before he has tumbled to the necessity of bestirring himself. Under modern conditions it may be the whole battle.

It is just a question, then, of whether the slow may not become the constipated mentality. But against this possibility there are certain counteracting factors. Even in Lowland England, after the Saxon Conquest, it would be quite a mistake to think of John Bull as a pure-bred, or whole-minded, Teuton. It stands to reason that the pirate immigrants can never have arrived in sufficient numbers to have formed more than a thin upper-crust of the population. No doubt they were able to

ENTER JOHN BULL

count for more than their actual numbers in imposing their own way of thought along with their language ; but the Celtic substratum was always there, and long after the ships had ceased to bring fresh relays of immigrants from the Danish or North German coastlands, there was continuous infusion of blood and ideas from the Fringe. John Bull was from the first an utterly different sort of person from those wild Saxon foresters whom Charlemagne was to drive, by dint of conquest and wholesale massacre, into the fold of Christ. And there were other and extremely vigorous infusions, both of blood and ideas, yet to come from overseas, to the end of gingering up Anglo-Saxon inertia.

A century and a half of almost complete darkness is after all a very small time for the formation of a new human product, and it only needs the first vivifying stimulus from Rome to bring a distinctively English civilization into full and glorious being. Even the extension of the Lowlands along the north-east coast that coalesces into the Kingdom of Northumbria, produces, in a quarter of the time, a harvest incomparably richer, judged by any but the lowest material standards, than that of the whole Roman occupation. Richer, one might add, than anything else that the Europe of its own time was capable of producing.

And if England was unable, for long, to sustain this morning glory, the Northumbria of Bede and Caedmon was yet to be followed, in the fullness of time, by the Wessex of Alfred and Dunstan.

The point to grasp is that by the English mind is meant something that even thus early has an atmosphere and character of its own, and that through all the growth of vicissitudes of fifty generations, it is the same essential John Bull whose personality it reflects. In that mind the process of thought, like that of digestion, tends to be withdrawn from the sphere of conscious volition. And for this reason John Bull has been taxed by his neighbours with being incapable of thinking at all, or only too capable

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

of disguising, from himself, the real motives of his actions. English lack of ideas, English cant and hypocrisy—these accusations have been so often repeated that John Bull himself has been inclined to let judgment go against him by default.

And yet behind his way of thought there is a deep-seated conviction that the things that can be expressed and formulated are of the conscious surface, superficial, and that the mind, like the body, is nourished by an inward process of digestion. The Englishman has little use for those elaborately constructed edifices of reasoning that are the delight of metaphysicians. He is always inclined to suspect them of being without proper foundations. And confront him with that clear-cut logic which is the pride of the Latin mind, he is always poking a suspicious nose into its premises. It seems to him like the conjurer's patter, a little too lucid to be quite genuine.

The dangers of such an attitude are obvious. He who is content not to let his brain know how the spirit moveth him, may easily come to enlist his conscience in the service of devils. Moreover the intuitive common sense on which he relies may degenerate into sheer muddle-headedness and slackness of wit. And unless, by one stimulus or another, he is kept continually up to the mark, this is precisely what does happen to him ; what has, in fact, happened again and again ; for there is sure, sooner or later, to come an Ethelred the Unready to undo the work of an Alfred the Great.

But the English mind has also its strength, which may, in the long run, much more than compensate for its defects. Its very tendency to delve beneath its own surface, and to check its conclusions by a common sense that is deeper than consciousness, keeps it in a saving and constant touch with reality. These metaphysical cloud castles may look very impressive from the ground, but it is the solid ground of fact on which John Bull prefers to repose. Give him something that he can stand upon—give him facts, and he will be content ; but inform

ENTER JOHN BULL

him that Being is the same as Not-being and the result of both is Becoming, and his reaction may be unprintably monosyllabic.

We might expect that, among the faults of such a mind, intolerance and intellectual pride will not be conspicuous. For a man who is constantly checking the creations of his own mind by the facts of nature, is not likely to fall too hopelessly in love with them. A temperamental distrust of all theories is the best safeguard against making a fetish of any one of them. This or that 'doxy or 'ism may be all very well, but does it make common sense? And may not its extreme logical conclusion make the pusher thereto look slightly absurd? For an Englishman's sense of humour is only the comic supplement to his common sense.

English hunger and thirst after reality may take different forms in finer or grosser appetites. It may go to the point with almost brutal directness, as when the Pagan high priest, at the court of Northumbria, gave his voice for conversion to Christianity on the simple ground that the gods, who ought to have secured him a lion's share of royal favour for services rendered, had palpably failed to deliver the goods, and were therefore only fit to be scrapped. Or it may be wistful and diffident, as when one of the King's thanes, in the course of the same critical discussion, compared the life of man to the flight of a sparrow through the warmth and brightness of the royal hall from one darkness to another—enough reason for embracing whatever faith can throw light upon that outer darkness.

The same spirit moves the great and humble genius of King Alfred, who wonders whether after his body is parted from his soul he shall ever know more of all those things that he has long wished to know, for, he says,

"I cannot find anything better in man than that he should know, and nothing worse than that he should be ignorant."¹

Men thus inspired may well display a spirit of

¹ Quoted in R. H. Hodgkin's *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, p. 680.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

reasonableness. For the mood of him who is athirst for knowledge is necessarily diffident. Alfred is perpetually conscious of his own limitations, diffident, one is sometimes tempted to think, to the extent of cramping his own genius. But that, after all, is a fault on the right side, and the Englishman is eminently a man who will distrust grandiose schemes and sweeping solutions, and prefer to advance one step, that he can make good, to experimenting with seven-league boots. Even in his most progressive mood John Bull is an incurable conservative, and he will not be hurried out of his stride by any consideration of logic.

Being thus the opposite of a revolutionary, he has none of the fierceness that goes along with intransigence. And his naturally slow and brooding disposition tends to a steadiness of nerve ; the sudden, explosive reactions of the Celt are alien to his disposition. He is, on the whole, a good-natured and tolerant person, and though he may be brutal, will never luxuriate in sadism. When, in the course of the last war, his enemies began to vaunt their own schrecklichkeit, he found his language lacking in any nearer equivalent than "frightfulness".

Mere beef-wittedness and lack of imagination might be held a sufficient explanation of this placability, but to think thus is to misconceive the English nature. By its fruits shall it be known. From the first, creative genius has conspicuously enriched it ; the mercurial Celt has never been able to compete with the Englishman in immortalizing the creatures of his imagination. But then John Bull is a mixed product, and the marriage of Celt and Saxon in his soul may account for no small measure of its fertility.

The brooding concentration of the Teuton is needed to work upon the imaginative exuberance of the Celt that it may impart reality to its dreams and add depth to its sparkle ; while the Celtic leaven is just what is required to leaven the Teutonic lump out of its lumpishness. And in the English temperament both elements have been happily, and continuously, compounded.

CHAPTER IV

SPIRITUAL CONQUEST

But a simple blend of Celt and Anglo-Saxon is far from comprehending, even in the loosest formula, the making of the English soul. It was not only the Celtic influence to which England was subjected ; the Continent, in whose civilization she had so recently merged her own identity, was again reaching out invisible arms towards her. The legions had gone, never to return, but the spiritual Cæsar had developed a more subtle technique for reclaiming Rome's lost provinces, and he did not lack forces to implement it.

The conversion to Christianity, that was the end of the dark age in Britain, soon ceased to take the form of a struggle between Christ and Woden—those forces had been too unequally matched ; but it became one for the spiritual sovereignty of England between Rome and her own fringe. It was on the heroic scale, for Celtic Christianity, with its missionary headquarters at the island monastery of Iona, had developed on lines of its own, independently of that Roman discipline which had never penetrated to those outer regions. And, with the true Celtic exuberance, it glowed with a pure heat of spiritual fervour, such as one would have to go back to apostolic times to find equalled.

The issue was decided at Whitby, in that Northumbrian Kingdom where Anglo-Saxon civilization was already in the twilight of its morning glory. Individual saintliness was matched with the power of a mighty system. Rome's champion was the great Wilfred, the first of a long line of ecclesiastical statesmen, a saint where his own interests, a ruthless power politician where those of his Church were concerned, the ideal embodiment of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

a spirit that a later age was to christen totalitarian. As at Calvary, the system broke the individual. The then King of Northumbria, one Oswy, made his choice with true English practicality. The learned arguments about the date of Easter, and so forth, failed to move him—what was certain, and admitted by both sides, was that the keys of Heaven belonged to St. Peter, and not to Columba or any other Celtic Saint. In planking for Peter's representative Owsy was therefore bespeaking the services of the only person capable of rendering them when he arrived at the end of his last journey.

That decision registered a second, and spiritual, Roman conquest of a Britain which now extended its civilized area right up to the North-east coast to, and even beyond, the derelict Wall. The acceptance of the Roman Church implied that of Roman civilization, because to all practical intents and purposes, the Church *was* civilization. It was, as the Empire had been, a vast super-national organization, imposing its discipline, its law, and a peace which was now the peace of God's Vicar, as it had been of a God Cæsar. It was all the stronger from having put off the vast material burden of old Rome, in the shape of aqueducts and amphitheatres, standing armies and fortifications, entailing a vast administrative machinery and crushing taxation. But its methods, though less crude, were none the less effective, and its success in some ways even more striking.

Certainly it took the raw English material in hand with a success that it had never approached in the days of the occupation. Instead of being a stagnant, provincial backwater, in which men lived and died without record, the land now abounded in scholars and artists, craftsmen and poets ; instead of second-rate imitations of what was itself a vulgar and second-hand style of artistic production, it produced works of original genius in almost everything to which it turned its hand. Even in the most material sphere, the English did such work as the Roman-British had hardly attempted in the way of

SPIRITUAL CONQUEST

reclaiming the waste and forest tracts with which the land was covered.

We must remember how vitally this mode of civilization was dependent on that great, super-national organization which Rome had again succeeded in imposing—though in so different a form from that of her old *imperium*—upon her province of Britain. How long it took to make, and by what stages it became fully effective, is another of those questions on which we must resign ourselves to remain guessing ; but this we do know, that in the course of two or three generations it had come to penetrate and transform the daily life of the people as—in Britain at any rate—the Cæsars and all their powers had never done.

Instead of the officials and publicans of old Rome, there was now, in every parish, the representative of the new, whose business it was to control the most secret actions and even thoughts of his human flock ; instead of the old colonies of retired soldiers, there were now planted all over the land communities of spiritual devotees, garrisons of Rome Militant, under the strictest discipline and on perpetual active service. For this new conquest was by no means the easy and final walk-over it had been in appearance. The old faiths, whose official superstructure had crumbled almost at a touch, had their foundations folk deep. The grotesque figure of the witch, that keeps cropping up for more than a thousand years after the conversion, is only one of the outward and visible signs of a still lingering fertility cult, a vast secret society with its covens still performing the old rites under the auspices of local “ devils ”. The burnings and torturings of a later age were but the concluding phase of a war in which the Church had been fain to wink at many an informal compromise with Satan.

Such still smouldering embers of heathenism were of little enough importance compared with that of the occupation by Rome of all the key positions of civilized life. Education, juvenile and adult, was entirely in her

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

hands, and consisted in the imposition of her language and discipline of thought ; the Roman standard was the measure of all civilized achievement—a fact that could have a very cramping effect on a development of a native style in such matter as architecture where the Englishman was away from his own traditions of craftsmanship and like a man trying to express his thought in a foreign idiom.

The founder of the English historical tradition, Bede, was never more happily inspired than when he made his master work a Church history. For that, in Bede's time, had come to be almost the only national history worth recording. The ups and downs of the various local kings seem, in comparison, not much more than a glorified sporting supplement to the main news. It was nothing new for Rome to preserve the old tribal divisions and enforce her system through the agency of native rulers. But her own vision embraced a wider field. Only four years after that decisive conference at Whitby, she sent over a spiritual pro-consul, in the shape of the Levantine Theodore, who, as Archbishop of Canterbury, or as he himself claimed of the Isle of Britain, proceeded to organize and legislate for the whole of England as one single national unit, and actually to convene synods, or parliaments, of its spiritual chiefs, on two separate occasions. Not only that, but he had sufficient authority to impose the peace of Rome on the two most powerful of the English Kings, those of Northumbria and Mercia, who were in full swing of what must otherwise have been a war to the finish of one of them.

It may be said that Rome no longer had the same power to bleed her provinces white as in the old days. But can even this pass without qualification ? For such a process of exhaustion seems to have been what ended the brief and dazzling epoch of Northumbrian greatness. Even Bede, the Church's most devoted son, is witness to how the overgrowth of the monastic system was sapping the wealth and man power of the country. Just as the

SPIRITUAL CONQUEST

maintenance of the temporal empire had proved too crushing a burden for the British, so did that of the spiritual Empire threaten to be for the English Province. "What will be the end of it," says Bede, "the next age will show." It did indeed,

When monks affrighted
To seaward sighted
The wings, full flighted
Of swift sea kings.

But even under the Cæsars, the Romanization of Britain had never been as complete as that of the Continental mainland. And the question was bound to arise of how deeply this second, spiritual conquest really went. The answer to that would determine the part that England was destined to play in the drama of history, incapable though it might be of reduction to any simple or clear-cut formula.

For the main significance of England's position consists in her being neither one thing nor the other, neither wholly insular nor wholly continental. Whatever happens to be the dominant civilization of the Continent is bound to influence her continuously and profoundly, but that belt of surrounding water may just prevent it from imposing its pattern upon her civilization—in short, of conquering her. Or if, at any time, it does seem to have made such a conquest, the appearance will prove deceptive, and John Bull will not take long in reasserting his insular independence.

That, in a nutshell, is the almost nine hundred years' story of England as a province—or rather, after a very short interval, as two provinces—of the second, or spiritual, Roman Empire. During that whole time the spiritual dictatorship of the Roman Pontifex Maximus passed as formally unchallenged in England as in any other part of Catholic Europe. Her civilization was that of Rome, and he its supreme arbiter—to imply the least doubt of that was to incur the guilt of heresy.

But there was never a time in all history like the Middle

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Ages for disguising the real facts of a situation under conventional fictions, and the fact that John Bull had enlisted himself as an obedient child of Rome, did not in the least prevent him from deciding exactly how much or how little of Rome he was going to take into his system. And his decision, maintained with a surprising degree of consistency, was to take just as much or as little as happened to suit his personal convenience at any given time.

But when we speak of Rome, we have in mind something more than a Church, even in the widest sense. It was a way of looking at things, a mode of civilization. And it was that, really and fundamentally, for which her spiritual empire stood. For Rome was older than Christianity, and it was by the representative of a Supreme Pontiff that its Founder had been crucified. In becoming the official religion of the Empire, the faith of Christ had had, for better or worse, to adapt itself to the framework of the Roman system. How much had survived the process that Christ would have endorsed might be hard to say, but that neither Christianity nor Rome could otherwise, in any form whatever, have weathered the flood of triumphant barbarism, seems, humanly speaking, certain.

But the Christian faith was not the only originally hostile influence that Rome was capable of absorbing. While her Empire was still at its temporal zenith, the Jeremiahs of her ancient republican Houses had been contrasting the degeneracy of her citizens, not with the holiness of saints or the constancy of martyrs, but with the spirit of freedom that animated those Teutonic tribesmen who were eventually to become her conquerors. That spirit may hardly have begun to crystallize itself in formal institutions, for it is too late in the day to take seriously the retrospective wish dreams of those erudite Victorians, whom nothing would suffice but to furnish their ancestors with a complete apparatus of constitutional democracy in their native forests. What does

SPIRITUAL CONQUEST

stand out, from all the records we possess, is that the sort of person from whom the invaders of the Roman Provinces, including Britain, were drawn, was an untamably free man, jealous of his freedom, but, for that very reason, faithful to the death to the leader he had freely elected to serve. That was the exact opposite of the Oriental spirit of servile and unquestioning obedience ; it was also in conflict with all Roman notions of centralized efficiency, this intransigent determination of the Man to maintain his personal dignity and freedom intact against authority.

It was just a question of how long this spirit would survive the formal acceptance of Roman civilization. For the last thing the barbarians had ever wanted to do was to overthrow Rome and set up their own civilization on its ruins. Rome, was to their simple way of thinking, one of the facts of nature—its empire was everlasting and its law was the truth. The proudest conqueror no more wished to overthrow her than the self-made millionaire to abolish the House of Lords. He would have been a fool to do so, for here was a system ready to his hand that would give him an authority very different from that of a horde leader of free tribesmen.

If the old heathen gods had collapsed at the first impact of Rome—might it not be expected that the old forest freedom would go the same way ? And it did, where the barbarians quartered themselves on provinces of the mainland that had been completely Romanized, and where enough of the old system remained in being for the new masters, after their clumsy fashion, to grasp the controls. It is true that the parts were by this time so rusted and damaged that the machine would no longer function with the old efficiency over vast areas—units of government tended to become smaller and smaller, until kings counted for more than emperors and lords than kings ; but this did not affect the principle of the thing, which was that over big areas or small, it was the ruler's business to rule and the subject's to obey. Thus, under

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

the early Frankish Kings of Gaul, "there was," in the words of Professor Oman, "no trace of popular government . . . the ancient German freedom had disappeared, to give place to an autocracy as well defined as that of the vanished Roman Empire."¹

Had the prehistoric land connection between England and the Continent remained intact, there can be no doubt that such a fate would equally have overtaken whatever habits of freedom the English had brought with them from overseas. The Roman way of government, the Roman exaltation of authority, would have come back with the Church, which, by monopolizing literacy, was alone capable of staffing even the most primitive administration, and could also immeasurably enhance the ruler's importance by attaching a divine sanction to what had not, in practice, amounted to more than a glorified team captaincy.

But the influence of Rome could never be exerted as strongly and continuously across even the narrow seas as it could across a land frontier. And it was just this reduction from a stream to a trickle that enabled the island civilization to use it without being deflected from its natural course of development. Even if we cannot credit the pre-conquest Englishman with more than the merest embryo of what we should call democracy, there is no trace in his records of anything that a modern historian could fairly characterize as autocracy, defined or otherwise. There is, even thus early, a gulf wider than the Channel between England and the Continent.

Whatever light our all too scanty records shed upon the ways and proceedings of these proto-Englishmen shows that any attempt to coerce or regiment them is, even to the toughest ruler, practically unthinkable. The principle of government by consent is none the less honoured, from the fact that it operates more by instinct than by formula.

The habit of mooting, or thrashing out in discussion,

¹ *The Dark Ages*, by C. Oman, p. 126

SPIRITUAL CONQUEST

any question of importance was one of ancient standing with the Teutonic peoples, and the most vivid of our early records show how firmly it had taken root on English soil. The Kings who presided over such discussions as those about the reception of Christianity seem less like sovereigns than chairmen of committees, with an influence in proportion to the strength of their personalities. And down even to the settlement of local affairs, whatever may or may not have been done would seem to have been mooted first, at any rate, by the people it was most important to conciliate. Nowhere do we get the impression of affairs being run with official smoothness by orders from above.

There is something in the growth of Anglo-Saxon civilization that resembles that of the English oak, the same toughness and stubbornness of fibre, the same combination of slowness and undeflectability. From the first, John Bull's innate conservatism keeps him, with invincible obstinacy, to the way his fathers have trodden and the rights they have bequeathed. His kings, not excepting the great Alfred, are declarers rather than givers of the law, and even so, only by the advice and consent of the council, or witan, to whom every question of importance is referred.

If there is progress, it is like the growth of the oak, by hardly perceptible increments. The Roman influence, with the Church as its vehicle, does undoubtedly tend to enhance the prestige of all kinds of authority. A king—especially as the many coalesce into one—becomes hedged with a divinity over and above his practical value ; there is a peace of the Lord's Anointed as there was, formerly, of the Divine Cæsar, enforced by appropriate sanctions ; even the local lords gain a certain increment of power by process of legal definition.

But it is all a matter of degree, and compared with what is going on upon the Continent, one can only be impressed by the invincible tenacity of the native life and tradition. Pre-conquest England never does, as a

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

matter of fact, take on more than a veneer of the Continental Romanization. In her heart of hearts she remains obstinately insular. Anglo-Saxon Kingship never develops into anything remotely comparable to the autocracies overseas. Even so ferocious a military conqueror as the Viking Canute, once he has got the crown firmly on his head, has the sense to put himself on the right side of his new subjects by assuring them—and he is a man of his word—that he will be their kind lord, and unfailing in his observance of their law—no tyrant, that is to say, but a constitutional monarch in all but the name. Nor do we find any English counterpart to the petty despotism that marks the beginnings of a feudal system on the Continent, where Roman legal notions maintain enough of a debased continuity to weight the scales decisively in favour of the top dog.

There is already beginning to invest English life a certain distinctive atmosphere. It would perhaps be premature, or at any rate lend itself to misunderstanding, to describe it as one of liberty—one would be on safer ground in talking of a certain fundamental decency and reasonableness that we should otherwise look for in vain, in the record of those dark and cruel centuries. The history of France and Western Germany under the Frankish, or Merovingian, Royal House is one long nightmare of almost unbelievable atrocities, nor do we find a much better state of things under the other barbarian monarchies that had parcelled out the wreckage of the Empire. And even when we come to the mighty personality of Charlemagne, what a mere savage he is compared with such a Christian gentleman as Alfred ! Where else in Europe shall we meet with such kings as some to whom Bede introduces us ; so tolerant and fair-minded, capable, with their councillors, of discussing the knottiest problems in a spirit of even-tempered detachment. Indeed, we shall find it no easy matter to raise a colorable tyrant, of any note, out of the annals of pre-Conquest, and Christian, England.

SPIRITUAL CONQUEST

It may be the union of Celt and Saxon in the English temperament that accounts for a sweetness that is its most endearing, and one of its most persistent, features, and not infrequently becoming sweet reasonableness. And to achieve that is to have opened the road to the achievement of a free civilization. For without that quality men will neither tolerate nor desire any freedom except their own.

CHAPTER V

UNCOMPOUNDED UNITY

So far we have been describing the seeds out of which any eventual patriotism must grow, rather than patriotism itself. Whatever vague sense there may have been abroad of a common spirit beginning to stir among the ancient British tribes had been crushed under the weight of Roman *imperium*—though perhaps not quite to death. But even Rome, whose system was the negation of any patriotism but her own, had done something, in spite of herself, to prepare the way for that of England, by the mere habit she had created of thinking of that province as one civilized unit, and perhaps still more by the network of roads which was the most effective means of such union.

But with the coming of the Anglo-Saxon, when every little chief or king is an anarch fighting for his own hand, how can we talk of a nation in any sense of the word?

And yet, in this darkest and most confused time, men were beginning to think in terms if not of one nation, at least of two. The very fact that it took a century and a half of fighting to push the Celtic civilization back into the Highlands, made it inevitable that men should begin to simplify their notion of the conflict into a plain issue of Briton versus Saxon. This must have been more than ever the case when the Britons made—as they certainly did—an amazing combined rally under the military genius whom posterity knows as King Arthur, hurling back the invaders into the east beyond Bedford and Aylesbury, and giving peace to the land for a generation. To the monk Gildas, who is writing towards the end of this time, the British are “our nation”, as opposed to the Gentiles, the Barbarians, a race hateful

UNCOMPOUNDED UNITY

to God and man. Nor did the English themselves fail to combine, if we may trust to the tradition of at least two of their most redoubtable kings of single tribes having functioned in the capacity of generalissimo for all.

It would be a mistake to make nationality too rigidly dependent on political union, especially in times when politics were so primitive. The Church, which was the real dynamic factor of civilized progress, in her lordly Roman way ignored any other boundaries than her own. To her, Britain was Britain, and if she elected to make two provinces of it instead of one, that was as much a matter of her own convenience as it might have been to a Cæsar. Long before there was any formal union there was a sense of unity, and it could only be a matter of time before one of the royal Houses should perpetuate at least a Bretwaldasship, or suzerainty, over the rest. And in the third decade of the ninth century it seemed this had at last been achieved by the Kings of Wessex.

But it is difficult to be certain with anything so undisciplined as the English nature how much this really meant, or how long it would have lasted, but for the last great assault of Nordic heathendom on Christian civilization, delivered by the Viking sea rovers—the hornet's nest stirred up by Charlemagne's feats of bloody conversion in the home of the original Saxons. For the compounding of nations may often be best effected by their elements being pounded together, as in a mortar.

These Vikings managed to become the scourge of Europe because they enjoyed a virtual monopoly of sea power, and were past masters in the art of exploiting it. The secret of their technique lay in their extraordinary mobility. Even on land, their way was to commandeer all the horses they could lay hands on and turn themselves into a sort of mounted infantry, arriving at this or that selected point in advance of any preparation to meet them. With no naval force to oppose them they were able to appear out of the blue at their chosen point of landing, and get away with their loot as soon as a

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

concentration of land forces made things too hot for them. The time would come when they would be able to stand their ground and defy any concentration.

The process of adding to the mixture of English stocks by relays of invaders from overseas was one that could only be continued so long as the British seas provided free passage. Once a sea power was established strong enough to forbid this, John Bull would be master of his own insularity. It is thus that the episode of the Viking, including the Viking-Norman, invasions represents the last of those arrivals in arms that had been chronic from time immemorial.

What effects are we to ascribe to this latest infusion of new blood into English veins? To look at it from the standpoint of the old British, or Celtic, civilization, we might say that the Dane was the Saxon over again, with his few redeeming features cut out. The brooding reflectiveness, the rather sleepy good-nature of the Saxon temperament, had no counterpart beneath a winged hat.

The Viking was a ruthless and uncompromising realist, of an almost unbelievable energy. He was out frankly for the main chance, and he stuck at nothing in his pursuit of it. Though a fearless and formidable fighter, fighting was with him no affair of romantic honour, but a practical short cut to an equally practical end. He was fundamentally a trader, but it was, with him, entirely a matter of calculation whether he could secure the bigger returns by force or by bargaining. Fighter though he was, he went on the principle that the worst injury could be compounded, or the bitterest vendetta closed, for cash down. A good lie or piece of treachery might be a paying proposition, but not the sort of lie that deceives oneself. What makes the Viking the greatest of all story-tellers is the way he goes for the naked and unvarnished truth. In the sagas, it is recorded how one of a number of prisoners lined up for beheading thought the opportunity a good one for ascertaining whether consciousness could survive it long enough for him to stick the pin he

UNCOMPOUNDED UNITY

was holding into the ground. And, what is even more significant, the story-teller resists the temptation of recording that he succeeded.

We must not expect from the Viking that aptitude for piety and artistic creation that we find in the Saxon. His energy was bespoken for the practical business of getting on, and he had no time to waste in introspection or brooding. But that perfect absence of sentiment made him the most adaptable of mortals. There was no clinging to old customs or tradition for their own sake. If he should find the religion or civilization, even of those he harried, to hold out better prospects of practical advantage, he would adopt it without the least hesitation. It was characteristic of his first Christian King, the sainted Olaf, to have signalized his conversion by fetching a good, hearty swipe with a club upon the most venerable of his ancestral images. For the Viking had as little sentiment about his gods as about anything else.

His adaptability was not only to his own advantage, but to that of everybody who might be concerned with him. Brutal he might be, but there was nothing of cruelty for its own sake about him, and, with his bargainer's instinct, he was always open to a paying accommodation or, if defeated, to cut his losses and submit to the best terms he could get. Even as a victor, after he had exhausted his exuberant high spirits by slaughtering any monks or tossing such babies on to spears as might be handy, he was ready to amalgamate with the native population on fairly tolerable conditions.

From the English point of view this new infusion, provided it did not wholly swamp the existing civilization, had much to be said for it. For the very thing that the Anglo-Saxon wanted to correct that inertia and sluggishness into which he was always in danger of subsiding, was a charge of this uncompromising energy. The Viking—to use an expression that would have thoroughly appealed to him—was about the liveliest wire in history.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

But it was just that question, whether English civilization was going to be swamped for good and all, that was at issue. And not only English, but Christian civilization seemed on the point of losing its last elements of cohesion under these repeated hammer blows all along its coasts as far as Italy. The brunt of offensive must needs fall on the island, without sea power or national unity, that lay right in the Viking path. A Viking England would have formed the base for such a further offensive as Western Christendom, with Islam battering at her from the south and herself apparently relapsing fast into the chaos of barbarism, could hardly have hoped to resist.

All seemed to be going according to plan—the heathen plan. By the middle of the ninth century the enemy had abandoned his cut and run tactics and, continually reinforced, had started to winter a field army in England. That army received a smashing defeat at the hands of Ethelwulf of Wessex, but it was labour lost without sea power. There were many more Danes where these had come from, and they were soon carrying all before them. The North, the East, the Midlands, all were overrun, and it was plain that nothing short of a miracle could save Wessex, and, through Wessex, Christendom.

That miracle happened, in the person of Ethelwulf's youngest son, Alfred, a chronic invalid, called in his early twenties to retrieve a situation that to all appearance was past hope, and in which, at the best, one single false move, or failure to discover the ideally best move, would have ruined everything—and Alfred did retrieve it.

But he did more than "caddle" as the old song says "those worsbirds the Danes"; for he did not hesitate to take upon his own shoulders the task of rebuilding, from its foundations, a shattered civilization. As if it were not enough to lead and govern, he must also be the schoolmaster of a people reduced, by the stress of war, almost to their pre-Christian illiteracy; amid the cares of state he must find time for creating, with his own pen, the beginnings of a native literature. This at a time

UNCOMPOUNDED UNITY

when most kings, even the greatest, were incapable of so much as signing their own names.

England had taken shape in a brain great enough to comprehend her ; and she came forth armed, like Athene from the head of Zeus. Armed in the most literal sense, for Alfred, with that unfailing rightness of his, had realized her overmastering need of sea power. With a fleet such as he started to build for her she would be insular in the active and no longer the passive sense ; access to her shores would be by her permission. To that his military measures were secondary, his consolidating his hold on whatever territory he won back from the Norsemen by a system of fortified " burhs " or self-garrisoned townlets, and his gathering strength for the inevitable counter-offensive by which, after his death, the whole of England would be united, as never before, under his House.

That work of conquest and security was no end in itself but only the means to bringing the England of Alfred's forevision into reality. It was to be a learned, a fruitful, and a Christian civilization of which he had laid the foundations, and which he left to his children, and his children's children, to rear to completion. "Above all, it was to be in the fullest sense a native, and not a Roman, civilization.

This was the more remarkable as Alfred's first impressions might have been calculated to make a complete Romanizer of him. For when in infancy he had had the rare good fortune of being sent, by a pious father, to Rome, Pope Leo IV so far succumbed to the little fellow's charm as to adopt him as his " bishopson " and hallow him—though with questionable legality—as King. But Alfred, though the Church had no more devoted son, did not like some of his successors yield to the temptation of sinking the patriot in the Catholic. It was characteristic of his genius that he should have conceived of educating the nation on a vernacular basis, rather than in the tongue and thought of Rome. Not the least of those more

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

than Herculean labours with which he burdened himself was that of rough-hewing what constituted, for him, the key works of classical literature into honest, muscular West Saxon. As a law-giver he resisted what must have been for a genius like his the bitter temptation of straightening out the barbaric tangle of the traditional dooms into something like Roman system and simplicity ; but with a modesty as rare as it was profound, he confessed that he dared not set down in writing much of his own, lest it should fail to please those who came after him, contenting himself with amendments in detail—and that only after consultation with his advisers. He did not even neglect the song craft so beloved of his people. If we are to reject as unproven the legend of his having penetrated the Danish camp disguised as a minstrel, it is at least thoroughly in character of him who could write of himself,

“ Keenly he longed to put forth songs to the folk to make men merry, and many stories. . . . ”

This creation by Alfred—though he did not live to see it completed—of an England for the first time fit to be called a nation, is one of the most stupendous achievements on human record, and it is enough glory that it should, under his grandson Athelstan, have risen to the status of a first class European Power and, in the following generation, have enjoyed something like a brief golden age of peaceful prosperity. But no man's genius, even the greatest, can provide any order of society with the elements of permanence. That can only come through the ingrained habits of many generations. Alfred's England was a marvellous feat of improvisation, but its unity was of the surface ; let it get into incompetent hands, and it had no power of itself to hold itself together. Alfred, though he could produce descendants not unworthy of himself, could not, from his invalid body, bequeath them strength to live out their days.

It was not only the vitality of the rulers but that of the country that was being sapped. During this tenth century

UNCOMPOUNDED UNITY

the spiritual power of Rome was undergoing one of its periodical revivals. A new wave of monastic enthusiasm, emanating from the Benedictine Foundation of Cluny, was putting new life into the Church, but a life parasitical upon that of its hosts. Communities of monks, living in strict celibacy and with their allegiance centred in Rome, were acquiring more and more of the land and more and more of power in the State. No doubt of their bringing to England the highest spiritualizing and civilizing influence of an age just beginning to grope its way out of darkness, but it was a cosmopolitan importation that had to be paid for in the depressing of the national power of resistance below safety level.

It only needed a failure in the line of strong Kings, and the renewed stress of Viking invasion, to bring the house that Alfred had built toppling about the ears of its inmates. Monk-ridden England, with its constituent parts, or earldoms, only loosely united, was incapable of providing that naval defence for which Alfred had stipulated, or of concentrating military resistance either in time or in sufficient strength. It was child's play for the Vikings, under these circumstances, to collect all the removable wealth of the country by successive levies of blackmail, as a preliminary to appropriating the country itself. This, fortunately, meant less than it would have in the time of Alfred. The Vikings were no longer a serious menace to Europe ; they were already in process of conversion to Christianity, and a Danish conquest did not amount to anything much more serious than the placing of an extremely competent monarch on a throne that had been occupied by an extremely fatuous one. King Canute might, in fact, have passed for the representative Viking, perfectly unscrupulous and perfectly adaptable. Having got what he wanted by methods of sheer frightfulness, he made a complete *volte face*, sent home his Danish forces with a great deal better grace than William of Orange parted with his Dutch guards, and settled down for all the world as if he had been a

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

true successor of Alfred. Whereby the menace of Danish invasion had found its own remedy.

But the mere fact of this extremely astute young man perceiving that his cue lay in conciliating national sentiment in England, shows that the work of Alfred had not all been destroyed. England was becoming slowly conscious of herself, but it was an England shaken to such foundations as she had, and in a state of hopeless demoralization. Nor was the brilliant opportunist on her throne an Alfred, to reconstruct her civilization from the foundations upwards. For that a more drastic conquest was needed, and a conqueror on a higher plane of civilization than that of the unsophisticated Viking. Such a conqueror was soon to be forthcoming. For the colony of Viking adventurers that Rollo the Ganger had planted, a century before, in the lower Seine Valley, had now armed itself with all the resources of civilization without in the least slaking its inherited lust for power. The result, as in modern Japan, was one of the most formidable human products ever compounded.

The Norman, though he might talk French and even think of himself as a Frenchman, would have been better defined as the Viking raised to the n th power. All the essential Viking qualities were there, only with the reinforcement of a steel-like strength and suppleness; the same uncompromising realism, the same ruthless concentration on the main chance, the same diamond-cut-diamond keenness and litigiousness, the same complete absence of sentiment and scruple. When the Norman resumed his ancient calling of robbery under arms, it would be in pursuit of a legal claim, and under the banner of the Cross.

Anglo-Saxon civilization, with its strong Danish infusion, and the tradition of Alfred broken, seemed plainly destined either to remain in the Danish or be drawn into the Norman orbit. But it made one surprising attempt, that only just missed success, to recover its own soul. With the exhaustion of Canute's progeny, the

UNCOMPOUNDED UNITY

Norman took the lead by placing his own candidate on the throne, a prince of Alfred's line half-Norman by birth and wholly Norman by sympathy. But popular sentiment was pathetically ready to fasten upon good King Edward as if he were a second Alfred—long after his death his memory was treasured as that of the ideal English sovereign.

The real King Edward was neither a saint nor a patriot, but a rather dim personage who could think of nothing better for the distressful state of his realm than to invite the Normans to take it in hand by what amounted to a peaceful conquest. The effect of this was to detonate an explosion of nationalist sentiment which sent all the Normans, who had begun to occupy the key posts of Church and State, flying for their lives across the Channel, and to set up the bewildered King Edward as patriotic figurehead, with all but the trappings of sovereignty appropriated by the great Earl Godwin, who had managed, with very doubtful credentials, to cast himself for the role of patriot hero. In a year Godwin was dead, and it had fallen upon Earl Harold, his son, to repeat Alfred's achievement of national resurrection.

But if there was ever a member of the human race capable of becoming a second Alfred to build up English civilization anew from its foundations, it was not Harold—and nothing less was required. Thus time and fortune were against him, for he was cast in the heroic mould, a superb fighting leader who might have been trusted to pull a people through any ordinary crisis of its fate. But a greater than he was biding his hour on the other side of the Channel, the bastard Duke, in whom all the essential qualities of the Viking had attained their most consummate development, and who quietly, but with undeviating singleness of purpose, was preparing the political and military ground so that, when good King Edward closed his eyes, England would fall into his hands, preferably without a blow.

Harold had not been idle ; during the twelve years of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

his power he had been doing all that man could to make England responsive to the master touch upon her helm ; to restore the self-confidence that the Danish conquest had shattered. But the cards, manipulated by so consummate a sharper as Duke William, were overwhelmingly against him ; and a supreme conjunction of luck and cunning—a Channel gale, a shipwreck, an oath extorted as the alternative to immediate elimination, enabled the wily Norman to put whatever claim his rival might have had to the succession so much on the wrong side of the law of Christian nations as to turn a filibustering adventure into a crusade.

Even so, a patriot King of Harold's calibre, supported by a united nation, should have been more than a match for the stoutest invader. But England had never been more than a bundle of superseded kingdoms tied together and perpetually tending to fall apart, nor had the Danish North or Saxon South ever properly amalgamated ; and Harold was presented with the worst of both worlds by the almost unbelievable coincidence of a Scandinavian with a Norman invasion. In his capacity of national King he was forced to leave his south coast uncovered, and rush north to register the most annihilating victory ever obtained over a Viking grand army. Then back again, with whatever that dreadful day and an amazing forced march had left of his original Southern army—but without a man from the North and Midlands—to fling himself in the path of William's fresh and undepleted army. And then, if the long run of luck had turned, if an English battle-axe had only got the Duke instead of his horse, Hastings might have been as resounding an English victory as Stamford Bridge a few days before, and Anglo-Saxon civilization have obtained a new lease of life.

In that case we can say now with confidence that England's triumph would have spelt her ultimate disaster. Anglo-Saxon civilization had much that was gracious and beautiful, that the Norman could neither understand nor

UNCOMPOUNDED UNITY

replace. But the England that Alfred had made had been weighed in the balance and found wanting in the unity and depth of soul that alone could have enabled her to work out her destiny in freedom. Even the experience of Danish tutelage had failed to go to the root of the evil, and it is hardly conceivable that a victorious Harold could have accomplished more than Canute had done. Some more drastic treatment was needed to purge the English temperament of the inertia and "unreadiness" that were its bane ; to pull the whole nation together and render it capable of playing that part in history for which Providence—if we may make that convenient assumption—had cast it.

CHAPTER VI

COMPLETION BY CONQUEST

One of the first definite impressions that penetrated even the thickest of our skulls in the history classroom was that in 1066 England was conquered by the Normans, who incidentally introduced the feudal system. That version of the facts would no doubt have been heartily endorsed by those Norman shareholders in the company of which Duke William was managing director, and who received their dividends in the form of confiscated estates ; and even more heartily by the human complement of these same estates, who found themselves reduced to a state of helotage in which their interest in pig and ox ceased when they became pork and beef, and in which they could be murdered for about half the tariff applicable to " Frenchmen ". But we, who are looking at the matter in a perspective embracing nine centuries of subsequent history, can see that so far from depressing England, the Conquest made her England in a sense that she had never been before ; and that its effect was not only to strengthen and unify, but also to make her capable of that independence, not only of action but of soul, that has been the secret of her greatness.

There is a law of historical gravitation as binding as Newton's—the greater draws the less. Bring the Kingdom into the orbit of the duchy, and the duchy in the long run will become the satellite.

Even now, looked at from outside, the England of King William enjoyed such security and power as it had never known under his predecessors. The age-long menace of invasion from overseas was never, except for one or two almost negligible exceptions, again to materialize. What William had got, William would hold. Too late the

COMPLETION BY CONQUEST

Scandinavian Power, that had gone out of its way to make him the free gift of England, sought to bring her back into its sphere. An armada, said to be of a thousand ships, was assembled to make another Danish conquest of England nineteen years after the Norman one. William was more than ready; reinforcements were rushed over from his French dominions, the East Coast was stripped of supplies, and he actually found means of stirring up mutiny in the enemy fleet, which ended in the Danish King being murdered in church with the fleet still in harbour. That was the last that England was ever to hear of Viking invasions.

The spiritual Cæsar who had been William's direct backer had made an equal miscalculation. The Conquest may have been a Crusade, but it was not going to be a Roman conquest—not if William knew it. He did indeed apply the Norman broom to the Church as he did to everything else Anglo-Saxon, by re-staffing its higher posts under the controlling genius of his Primate and "grand mover of everything", no Norman but an Italian, Lanfranc, who, before he had turned to religion, had won a European reputation in the study and practice of Roman Law. William would take and use whatever Rome had to give, but he had not the faintest intention of letting Rome use him, even when Rome spoke with the mouth of the awful Gregory VII, the man who could drive the Emperor himself to the crowning humiliation of penance in the snow at Canossa. But even Gregory could get no change out of William, and knew enough of William's strength not to press for it. Thus the first effect of the Norman Conquest was that of a permanent and effective warning of all other would-be conquerors, spiritual or temporal, off the King of England's preserves.

But of what avail, it might be asked, when England was held as the annexe of a French Duchy, by a French-speaking aristocracy? The answer was, in effect, given by the Duke himself when, arming for Hastings, he found that he had got on his hauberk back to front, and passed

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

it off by remarking that he had changed a dukedom for a kingdom. Royalties are by nature quick to adapt their nationality to their interests. It was obviously the royal game to play up to the part of good King Edward's successor, and get the backing of national sentiment against the chronic treason of a feudal baronage. And it has never been John Bull's way to indulge an unseasonable realism about the nature of his crowned figurehead. Loyalty, like love, is a passion that thrives easiest upon make-believe.

Only nine years after the Conquest, some of the chief beneficiaries from the great land distribution were up in revolt, and the English putting them down on behalf of King William. Henceforth every claimant or successor to the throne would make it his first business to get at least the reputation with his English subjects of being a popular sovereign in the good old native tradition. Their support was so obviously his prime asset, and they were ready to meet him more than half-way. None of the pre-conquest Kings had commanded a greater enthusiasm of loyalty than that with which the English rallied to the cause of that fascinating and enigmatic scapegoat of priestly propaganda, William Rufus, or to that of his brother Henry, after his death. And they had their reward when this same King Henry crossed the Channel with an army which, fighting dismounted in the English fashion, forty years, to a day, after the Norman landing in England, conquered Normandy from his brother Robert. The English, as we gather from the Anglo-Norman chronicler, William of Malmesbury, saw in this the manifest dispensation of Providence to even up the score of Hastings.

The grouping of forces brought about by the military necessities of the Conquest, that of Norman versus English, or King plus aristocracy against people, was too flatly against the laws of political gravity to last out even one average reign. It did not matter what language a monarch might speak, or what might be his private

COMPLETION BY CONQUEST

opinion of the great mass of his subjects ; the bare instinct of self-preservation would drive him to add their weight to his own against the forces that were perpetually straining against the central power, and threatening, once they got out of hand, to involve the whole realm in a chaos of petty tyrannies whose cumulative horror would far exceed anything of which the most ruthless single tyrant, with all the ill-will in the world, would have been capable.

Nothing strikes us more about people in the Middle Ages than the way in which they were ready to give loyalty to the most uncompromising of crowned bullies, on the sole condition of their being strong. The more amiable qualities, by which monarchs achieve popularity in our own day, were more likely to be counted as liabilities than assets in a feudal order of society. The most damning verdict that could be pronounced by the English people on a Norman King was that of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle on Stephen : " He was a mild man, and soft, and good, *and he did no justice.*" But of his predecessor, Henry, an utterly ruthless egotist with a heart of steel, it is said that " he was a good man and there was great dread of him . . . he made peace for man and beast ".

Even in a survey so brief as this, we shall never make the story of English patriotism intelligible, unless we get a clear notion of what is implied by this order of society that in our school books we were taught to call feudal. Because if we are to go by the weight of expert authority, medieval man, as seen through academic glasses, would seem to have thought and felt in a way so utterly different from anything human with which we are acquainted, that we might as well give up the attempt to make sense of his proceedings. Patriotism, we are certain to be told, is a thing utterly incompatible with the complicated system of personal relationships and legal technicalities that exercised the skill of the feudal lawyer. Which indeed it would be, if we are to take for gospel every

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

quibbling explanation with which medieval man made it a point of honour to disguise his real motives.

There is, as a matter of fact, nothing more simple than the reality of the feudal system, nor more straightforward than its motives. Something of the sort was bound to have taken place after the downfall of the great, centralized bureaucracy by which Rome had given her peace to the vast area within the limits of her *imperium*, at the price of bleeding it to death. For many generations there could be no question of the European Sindbad again burdening himself with the Old Man of the Seven Hills. Administration was run on the lines of a private establishment, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world that the King should keep the state funds in a box by his bed, or that his chief ministers should be those nominally responsible for his wardrobe, his bed-chamber, his stables, and so forth.

Such an absence of state machinery was only the natural sequel to the excess of it that there had been under Rome. The vampire-like sucking inwards of the whole wealth and resources of the Empire, that had finally driven many a peaceful citizen out of her pale to try his luck with the barbarians, was an experience not likely to be tolerated again for many generations, even if there had been anybody capable of resurrecting the Roman bureaucracy. For though the barbarian dynasts who had parcelled out the empire were only too willing to be Cæsars in their own sphere, when it came to adapting Cæsarism to their own requirements they were as helpless as savages who have come upon some broken-down plant of civilized machinery and try to set it going.

The power of Rome, transmitted through a host of officials, had been perpetually present to her remotest subjects, a power as inevitable, and all-pervading, as that of Nature herself. But now Rome had ceased to be felt except in her spiritual and ghostly reincarnation. And the void she had left had never been filled. The power

COMPLETION BY CONQUEST

of such governments as had risen on her ruins was only transmittable at all, at any distance from its centre, by fits and starts, and on occasions of special urgency. The ordinary churl or freeman, cultivating his share of the land surrounding some out-country village, had little enough occasion to bother his head, in the way of ordinary routine, about any but local affairs.

Such a state of things must have appeared idyllic as compared with perpetual grinding inquisition and combing out of every man's resources that had been the price exacted by Rome for her peace. But there may come a time when men will be glad to purchase peace at any price whatever. When there is no longer a regular machinery of justice and police, the small man is liable to find the fruits of his labour taken from him by cruder methods than those of the publican. A sort of rough local justice, with a tariff of blood fines, may perhaps keep things tolerable in ordinary times, but when some new and terrible enemy comes on to the scene, one must get protection or die. And when the enemy is liable to arrive at any moment, by ship or on horseback, one must get it from the big man on the spot, or not at all. It is no use waiting for a central power that may take weeks to get into action. One must have a place to flee to and a force at hand capable of countering the enemy with a swiftness equal to his own. That meant the castle, and the mailed cavalry, of the local lord, who, being quite unsentimental about it, would not give, but sell his protection on the highest terms he was in a position to extract. The Roman law, always the friend of the top dog, had provided the machinery by which such a bargain might be concluded, on terms that put the petitioner's estate at the patron's arbitrary disposal. That no doubt helped to impart a tyrannously uncompromising logic to the contract of feudal service, as drafted by clerks steeped in the Roman tradition of the Continent. It is at any rate significant that in pre-Conquest England there was nothing that could be called a feudal system,

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

however much there may have been unsystematic approaches to the feudal principle.

But whether strictly or loosely applied, that principle was dictated by the necessity of a situation in which kings were unable to provide the area they nominally controlled with an efficient administration, or themselves with the means of maintaining one. The man on the spot became the man in power, and those within the circuit of his lordship were doing no more than recognize facts as large and palpable as the Vikings themselves, when they acknowledged themselves his men and, forsaking all other, clave only to him. But such a state of things was checkmate to the King, and could only lead to a chaos of petty tyrannies impinging on one another with the ceaseless unfruitful violence of nuclei and electrons in the centre of the sun.

For perpetual war was rooted not only in the nature of the feudal system, but—in its early stages at any rate—of the feudal lord. He was specialized for that ; from his earliest infancy he was conditioned to grow up into an illiterate brute, a focus of combative energy that it was agony for him to keep bottled up. Try to imagine the atmosphere of boredom that must have invested life in one of those fortress homes, with its glassless loopholes of windows, its fetid, ill-lighted interior, its higgledy-piggledy crowding, and its absence of any sort of comfort or convenience, and you will have more sympathy than blame for those unfortunate inmates who even in their own families could find no other relief except in perpetual brawls, which were so much a matter of course that travelling minstrels included in their repertoire a series of progressively urgent appeals to their patrons for God's sake to listen and stop their quarrels. Is it any wonder that when the baron had no foreign invader to fight, he would—if he had half a chance—be for forcibly removing his neighbour's landmark, or failing such an outlet for his energy, would organize fighting for the sheer sport of the thing.

COMPLETION BY CONQUEST

And finally—is it any wonder that treason should have been a habit planted almost as inevitably in such a man as fighting itself? Those who are accustomed to sentimentalize over the Middle Ages, invariably make great play with their horror of treason. Chesterton, in one of his most moving passages, describes Richard III as “truly the last of the medieval Kings. It is expressed in the one word which he cried aloud as he struck down foe after foe in the last charge at Bosworth—‘treason.’” Well, the man who had almost certainly disembarrassed himself, by percussion and asphyxiation, of two lawful sovereigns, had some right to be heard on the subject of treason. And no doubt his objection to it, if belated, was heartfelt, since treason was the curse of every medieval monarch’s existence, for the reason that no average feudal magnate, whose book it happened to suit, would hesitate to practise it. His Majesty was, in fact, on the horns of a perpetual dilemma. With no machinery at his disposal for exercising power over wide areas, he was forced to delegate it to vassals who, whatever oaths they might take, became almost automatically his enemies, since by his very position he formed a standing inhibition to that lust for power that was endemic in a feudal aristocracy. When he could, he would strive for a way of escape by delegating power to members of his own family; but even the reinforcement of an oath by family affection was hardly ever effective. To give even a son independent power was to launch him on a career of treason.

Now we are able to understand how exactly the reverse of the real truth it is to say that the Norman Conquest brought the feudal system to England. In law, this may indeed have a veneer of truth; the Norman law was feudal law. But the Conqueror, with his practical Norman genius, understood perfectly how to take the law, as well as religion, in the stride of his egotism. William was not the man to foul his new nest with the curse of kings, if he could possibly help it. And a kind

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Providence had so arranged things for him that he could help it. In the untidy Anglo-Saxon way, the country might have drifted into something equivalent to feudalism. But the centrifugal tendencies that brought down the English monarchy, introduced a monarch strong enough to curb him. Under a Norman monarch there would indeed be system, but it would be the exact opposite of feudal.

The author of that delightful ballad, "A right little tight little island," was very happily inspired when he introduced "Billy the Norman" into it; for it was just the rightness and tightness of that insularity that enabled William to do in England what even Charlemagne had failed to accomplish in his dominions—to build up an administrative machine strong enough to govern the whole realm as a single unit, stronger than any possible combination of disruptive forces that could be brought against it, and above all, strong enough to last. It was a very near thing; even so powerful a ruler as Harold had failed to do it. But the Norman conquest had started off the new monarchy with an irresistible military power to smash down any local opposition, and a practically clear field on which to build up his new order. And by a supreme stroke of luck, the repeated levies of blackmail that had been collected to buy off the Danes provided him with an excellent system of regular taxation, the lack of which had put the average feudal monarch at the mercy of his vassals. The fact that he should have so grossly violated all precedent as not only to make a habit of collection but actually of assessment, produced the first of many similar cries from the heart of the English tax-payer.

"There was not one hide nor yard of land, nay (it is shame to tell, though he thought it no shame to do) not an ox, nor a cow, nor a swine left, that was not set down in his writ."

But hardly as this steadily growing administrative organization—a thing without a parallel in contemporary

COMPLETION BY CONQUEST

Europe West of Byzantium—might bear on the Englishman under those stern and ruthless egotists of the House of Rollo, he was to have one brief but sufficient experience of the sort of thing from which it had saved him. It only needed an amiable waster on the throne with a doubtful title and a rival claimant, for full-blooded feudal anarchy to be let loose on the land. Castles sprang up like mushrooms, whose owners proceeded to exploit their opportunity in such a way that men said openly that Christ and his saints slept. It must have been with a huge sigh of relief that the country greeted the advent of a new monarch, stronger and more ruthless, if possible, than any of his predecessors and indeed, as it was not unplausibly reported, with something demonic in his blood, but at least capable of giving short shrift to the "devils and wicked men" whose castles he proceeded to pull down in even less time than they had been run up.

This King, Henry of Anjou, had something more than a double portion of that medieval energy which was soon to find vent in the storm and stress of Gothic architecture. It was not enough for him to restore and reinforce the Norman administrative machine, so that it gripped the country into unity as with clamps of steel, but, being a genius, he was inspired to do this by making the fullest use of that popular support which is a monarch's greatest asset. He had discovered the secret of all the greatest English Sovereigns, that a monarch who can put himself on the right side of his people can do pretty well as he likes otherwise.

It would be wildly absurd to talk of Henry II as in the remotest sense a patriot king. He was not an Englishman; he could not have talked to one of his English subjects in his native language, even in the highly improbable event of his condescending so to debase himself. England was only one piece in the game of empire he was playing, with half the provinces of France at his disposal. And yet, in that uncanny way genius

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

has, he shot wide of his conscious mark to one that he had not even seen.

To hold together the scratch collection of French provinces that had come to him by inheritance and marriage was a task that broke Henry's heart, and brought him to the grave cursing God. But God, we may imagine, took it with a smile of infinite understanding, knowing that He had destined this passionate child of His for a greater achievement than that of feudal imperialist. Henry of Anjou takes his place among the master builders of an England that he probably despised. And he takes it by having planned and wrought in a style truly national.

We need not recapitulate what is in every constitutional history ; how, not content with his predecessors' reliance in emergencies upon the loyalty of the English people, he sought to enlist their active co-operation in that process of orderly government, that habit of royal peace, that he sought to establish throughout the length and breadth of the land. There were two keys of power that in the feudal states of the Continent were held against the Crown by the great vassals—those of war and of justice, and Henry sought to get both of them into his own hands. The straightforward way, that which might have been expected to appeal to so imperious a nature, would have been to have worked it from above, by strengthening the hands of his sheriffs in the counties—the nearest equivalent to the dictatorial *gauleiter*. But the sheriffs themselves were too deeply bitten with the virus of feudalism to be quite reliable instruments—Henry, in fact, on one occasion made a clean sweep of the whole body of them. As master builder, he saw that in social no less than in stone construction the time was ripe for the transition from Norman to Early English. Only it was not called by that name—we know it as the jury system. Matters that abroad were settled in the court of the local Baron were taken over by the King's court, which, by a convenient fiction, was allowed not only to

COMPLETION BY CONQUEST

specialize itself by division, but even to tour the country in the persons of its plenipotentiaries, the judges, who made it a ruling principle to enlist the co-operation of the most responsible people in every neighbourhood, and with *their* eyes to penetrate into the facts of the strongest man's claim to his neighbour's property. When the judge was thus supported from above and below simultaneously, the most treasonably disposed magnate might hesitate at too open a contempt of court.

But Henry took an even more decisive step in deliberately arming his people, or rather, calling upon them to arm themselves. Every free man was required to provide himself with weapons and armour according to his means, and his neighbours, acting through their juries, were made responsible for seeing that every man did his duty. This drastic application of a time-honoured English, and Teutonic, principle, that of a popular *fyrð* or militia, was Henry's way of providing against a plainly impending French war, a war pretty certain to be complicated, for him, by rebellion.

But he had good reason, by this time, to lean with his whole weight upon the support of his English people. Their loyalty was the one thing on which he could bank with any certainty in a world of treason. Already, nine years previously, when he had been confronted with a combination of rebels and foreign enemies that had threatened to overwhelm him, his first question—he was in Normandy at the time—had been how it fared with his brave men of the City of London. And when he was assured that they were the most loyal in all his kingdom and armed to a man, "O God!" he cried, "keep the brave men of my city of London . . . you will have me in London before fifteen days are past, and I will be avenged on all my enemies." He was as good as his word.

And that mention of London brings us to another dominant factor in the growth of a national consciousness. The towns had suffered less than any other part of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

England from the iron hand of the Norman. London, which the Conqueror himself had taken care to conciliate with a reasonably generous charter, had probably gained considerably on the balance from the peace he had established, and had already given proof of what was to hold good for many centuries, that he who would control England must first get the support of London. The recipient of this lesson had been no less a personage than Henry's mother, the Empress Matilda, who, during the civil wars of the last reign, having got her rival Stephen safely under lock and key, had come up to Westminster to take over possession of his kingdom. But the inflation by success of an already swollen head induced Her Imperial Majesty to take her conquest so much as a matter of course, that she could afford to treat the citizens of London like dirt. She was going to have no nonsense, she told them, about confirming good King Edward's laws, but a fat contribution to her war chest in cash down, and when they had the impetinance to demur about collecting it, she chased them from her presence with a torrent of most unfeminine abuse. They did indeed go their way citywards, to come again, in full force, not with gold in their hands, but that which showed the proud Matilda how chasing is a game that two can play.

That lesson had obviously sunk deeply into the heart of her son, nor can it have been forgotten by its teachers. Those who imagine that there was anything of an English inferiority complex in "the brave men of London" had better read the account of his native city with which a Londoner of the time, a certain Fitzstephen, prefaces his life of another Londoner, the greatest Englishman of his time, Thomas à Becket. Not Dickens himself could have given more unqualified expression to the pride of the true cockney. London holds its own at all points with any city in the world—for wealth, for trade (which comes first on the list), for strength, for grandeur, for Christianity, for the honour of its citizens, the chastity

COMPLETION BY CONQUEST

of its citizenesses (they are "perfect Sabines"), even for its climate; a jolly city, a city of sportsmen, where, on Shrove Tuesday, all the young men turn out to indulge in "the well known game of football", each school and each craft having its own ball, and where all those who are too old to play ride out on horseback to watch, until they get so bitten by the excitement of it as to precipitate themselves into the scrum, with an effect probably not dissimilar from that of Mr. Will Hay's famous match at Narkover College.

Merry England, we may say, was born in London, and its birth certificate is in the clerkly hand of William Fitzstephen. And London, that great port and fortress and road junction, was already coming to be so much the nerve centre of England as to make it safe to predict that what London thought of herself to-day, England would be thinking to-morrow.

If indeed she needed any such encouragement to think it! For nothing would appear more certain than that the average Englishman at the dawn of the Plantagenet era was proud of being an Englishman, and rejoiced in good King Henry's glorious day. It mattered not in the least what King Henry himself might think or talk; his was too splendid a European figure not to be appropriated for purposes of patriotic symbolism. And nothing could better suit King Henry's book than to play up to the part.

Here, at any rate, is what a contemporary chronicler, Henry of Huntingdon, writes, in the true *Astraea Radux* vein, on the young hero's accession:

"Thine England calls thee, Henry, to her throne,
Now fallen from her once imperial state,
Exhausted, helpless, ruined, desolate."

to which Henry is supposed to reply,

"Thine own red cross, Proud England, leads me on
To fields where glory, victory, shall be won. . . .
I come to cause the tyrant's rule to cease
And o'er the gasping land spread smiling peace.
Land of my sires! ¹ . . ."

¹ T. Forester's translation.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

But Henry of Huntingdon died the year after his great namesake's accession, and too early by several centuries, to learn the grossly unmedieval nature of such straight, patriotic stuff. It is at least some excuse for him that most of his fellow chroniclers are guilty of the same regrettable anachronism. To the greatest of them all, the William of Malmesbury whom we have already seen crowing delightedly over England's tit for tat for Hastings, she is "our dear country", and even the pious Ordericus Vitalis, though he was only English on his mother's side and was packed off to a Norman monastery at the age of nine, is no less a lover of England and the English, whose "indomitable courage" and "devotion to the cause of their country" he does not fail to celebrate, though with rather more pity for their sufferings than glory in their achievements.

But even for so unashamed a patriot as our Henry of Huntingdon, it might seem a little daring to allow Henry of Anjou to characterize England as the "Land of my sires". Even if we go back through his mother's pedigree by way of the kings his predecessors, we might imagine Normandy or Norway to be the country specified, though certainly his maternal grandmother had given him a right to claim descent from Alfred. But it is positively staggering when we find this French Sovereign courting English nationalist sentiment by taking to himself no less an ancestor than the Roman-British Arthur, whose glory it had been to have smitten the English hip and thigh. But in this latest version Arthur had become, for ancestral purposes, the hero King of a Norman wish-dream, a super-Charlemagne, and conqueror of Rome at her prime, as well as an English wish-dream of an authentic national hero, Arthur the Conqueror.

Henry Plantagenet's subtle genius had never been more happily inspired than when he caused search to be made at Glastonbury—the Avalon to which nine Queens had borne Arthur at his passing—for the great King's remains. How precisely it was arranged between His Majesty and

COMPLETION BY CONQUEST

an obliging abbot must remain a mystery ; but there certainly was the coffin with Latin inscription all complete, and Henry, rather like the new squire who takes on the family ghost with the estate, entered complacently upon the prestige accruing from this visible and tangible proof of his mighty predecessor's existence. Arthur was after all just as much of an Englishman as Henry, and in appropriating them both England had, by taking thought, added immeasurably to her stature, both in her own eyes and those of the world.

Arthur was only the culminating hero of a long and glorious history of Britain under her Celtic kings, back to the Trojan Brutus, that was none the less valuable, as a stimulant of patriotism, from being mainly imaginary. This also was discovered as opportunely as Arthur's coffin, in an old Welsh book, which nobody ever saw but the discoverer, an ingenious monk of Monmouth, called Geoffrey. It came just at the right moment to provide England with a past in which Norman, Saxon, and Celt could participate on a footing of equal pride, and which would take away from the English the last lingering traces of the conquered feeling.

But the strong hand of her Norman French kings had resulted in something more than the creation, for England, of a fictitious past. The conditions were being established for a future of as yet unimagined potentialities. Henry Plantagenet had, in his own interests, made his realm of England the most secure in Europe, both against coercion from abroad and feudal anarchy within. It only remained for England, thus secured, to assume control of her own destinies, for an independent civilization to be launched on its career.

CHAPTER VII

NOLUMUS LEGES ANGLIÆ MUTARE

To deny the fact of medieval patriotism is to deny things as obvious as the sun. The idea that the men who wrought and thought in Gothic could have allowed their minds to be wrapped up in the parchment of feudal lawyers is, to put it mildly, academic. But patriotism, which is the love of a man for his country, is as manifold as love itself, and merely to record its existence is to tell us little more than that human beings are human. We must know the quality of patriotism, and its object, if we are to be enlightened concerning it.

Its object first, for it was only gradually that it became apparent that an Englishman, when he thought of his country, really meant England, or who, living in England, was fit to be called an Englishman. The Conquest had at least settled the former point by flattening out the old provincial loyalties, but so long as a Norman baronage continued to have a footing on both sides of the Channel, it would never quite lose its character of an alien and occupying garrison. For English patriotism, therefore, to come fully of age, it was necessary to cut the connection between England and Normandy; a thing that came to pass when the awakening self-consciousness of France, spreading outwards from Paris as a centre, and marking its expansion by a fairy ring of Gothic cathedrals, caused the unnatural fabric of a Plantagenet empire to collapse like a house of cards. Then it was that a Norman baronage, Norman now in nothing but name and wedded inseparably to English soil, was able to function as a patriot aristocracy.

But there is a further complicating factor that persists throughout the whole of the Middle Ages. Patriotism may

NOLUMUS LEGES ANGLIÆ MUTARE

rise to the love of England, but it also rises above it. The medieval Englishman, in his moments of most enthusiastic patriotism, never forgets that he is something more than an Englishman ; he is a Christian, and by that is implied membership in the Catholic Church which is the Roman empire risen again with a spiritual body ; a Christendom united not only as a league, but a soul of nations. To doubt for a moment that civilization, so ordered, is the only one that has a right, a divine right, to exist, constitutes the ultimate, the unforgivable treason called heresy.

It is during the time of the Anglo-Norman connection that this membership of the Roman communion bulks largest in the consciousness of the average Englishman. So long as there is any question of his being the under dog, he has everything to gain from alliance with the one power capable of making oppression bitter. In the black, baronial anarchy of Stephen's reign, it is the bishops and clergy who never cease to curse " the devils and wicked men " who are playing king of the castle all over the country. It is the Church, too, that provides a ladder by which the humblest Englishman can climb to the highest post in Christendom, even the throne of Peter.

The story of Thomas à Becket is of peculiar significance in this connection. Our own age may perhaps regard him in the light of the proud prelate, the mitred obstructionist of a reforming king. But it was not thus that he appeared to the English people, who had taken him to their heart even before his martyrdom at the hands of those same " devils and wicked men ", who were their cruellest enemies. " Blessed be he," they had cried, " who cometh in the name of the Lord ! " And after his death he became a veritable people's saint, a worker of kindly miracles. Not unworthily ; for despite his Norman extraction he stands forth for all time, as he stood facing his murderers on the chancel steps of his darkening cathedral, the undying Englishman, the stubborn, kindly John Bull, as obstinate as a mule in standing up for the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

last letter of his rights against a common bully. And if these also happened to be the rights of Rome, so much the better for Rome—and for England !

A figure of equal, and cognate, significance is that of Richard I. This Poitevin, whose most scornful oath was “do you take me for an Englishman?”, got elevated, after his death, into a patriotic hero—a more surprising transformation than that of Becket into a popular saint. But there was reason for it : Richard *was* a patriotic hero, only of the wider patriotism. Spiritual Rome, by a supreme effort of propaganda, had recovered her legions, and hurled them in a series of desperate counter-offensives against the rival civilization of Islam. In the third and most Catholic of all of these—for it had been originally organized under the greatest of the medieval Cæsars, Frederick Barbarossa, with the Kings of France and England in train—passed after Frederick’s death under the auspices of the lion-hearted hero, the flower of whose army was English, and who himself was at least as English as Arthur, and—what Arthur had never been—King of England.

Thus we need not be surprised that, within a century of Richard’s death, he has undergone a patriotic canonization not inferior to that of Arthur himself. Here is patriotism surpassing the crudest performances of latter-day jingoism. The real Richard had been a bloody-minded ruffian, in all conscience, but his record was mild and gentlemanly compared with that of the ideal English and Christian champion who massacres his prisoners, amid the delighted applause of the heavenly host, and then, with his devoted followers, proceeds to eat them, boiled.

Even during his lifetime, John Bull’s answer to Richard’s oath had been a very emphatic affirmative. He *did* take Richard for an Englishman, whatever Richard might choose to take an Englishman for, or rather, to take from him, for England was worth just as much to Richard as he could squeeze out of it. And yet never in

NOLUMUS LEGES ANGLIÆ MUTARE

his history did John Bull put his hand into his pocket with a better grace than when it was a question of raising an enormous capital levy to get his hero out of a German dungeon. It was perhaps cheap at the price of confirming England in the opinion she had already begun to form of herself as of a noble and puissant nation.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, therefore, we may say that England, if she had not achieved 100 per cent patriotism, was ripe for it. There were still three elements in her composition that one would class as definitely anti-national, and these were a half-Norman baronage, a French reigning House, and a Roman church. By the end of the century a patriot king was on the throne ; the baronage already had a tradition of national leadership ; and even the Church, if still in theory that of Rome, had acquired the practice of taking up the cudgels for England *against* Rome.

To tell that story in detail would be to rewrite English history. Here it must suffice to indicate its bare headings. Richard died just before the old century closed, and left to succeed him his brother John, no hero, but a criminal almost of genius, the one historical villain whose reputation the most enterprising biographical whitewasher has not yet dared to take away. Under his auspices events move with extraordinary rapidity. Within five years Normandy has come home to France, and with it the other Angevin provinces, except that in the South-west, remotest from Paris and therefore still outside the lengthening radius of French patriotism. The next ten years see John, left face to face with his English subjects, and in control of the tremendous administrative machine built up by the post-Conquest Kings, fairly driving the nation into unity by his attempt to constitute himself an effective tyrant and exploit the resources of England in order to reconquer his empire overseas, until he at last raises up against himself an opposition of such overwhelming strength—for the moment—as to force his signature to what subsequent ages have enshrined as the Great Charter.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

That, like so much other greatness, has been called in question of recent years. The fashion has been to write down the Charter as a feudal manifesto of reactionary tendency and no decisive importance ; and certainly the sort of Runnymede baron that we see in Victorian prints, oozing genteel manliness like the Prince Consort at a fancy dress ball, is not likely to pass muster with our sophisticated generation. But had the authors of the Charter been plaster idealists, inspired by modern notions of liberty, it is inconceivable that it would ever have struck root in English soil. One does not look for the likeness of the flower in the seed.

It is enough that a singularly representative coalition of nobles, churchmen, and Londoners should have been induced to react to a national crisis nationally, and that they should have produced a document so grandly conceived and nobly worded as to suffice for the basic statement of English liberties by their upholders from generation to generation.

Such achievement does not happen spontaneously, nor can we doubt that the inspiring genius was that of the Archbishop, Stephen Langton, who, though a true-born native Englishman, was among the leading lights of European scholarship as well as a statesman of the first rank, just the man to apply fundamental principle to the solution of a practical problem. That problem was how to deprive a crowned desperado of his power to turn the machinery of administration into an instrument of tyranny, without crippling the machinery itself and thus restoring the worse than royal tyranny of feudal anarchs.

Between that Scylla and Charybdis there lay but one safe passage—the English way. There would be no revolution, but its precise opposite ; the aggrieved interests would have the law on King John ; they would restore the *status quo* as in the days of Henry I ; they would have his great grandson's seal to the confirmation of that King's accession charter, brought up to date in a liberally

NOLUMUS LEGES ANGLIÆ MUTARE

enlarged edition and with the necessary guarantees for its provisions being executed. No doubt there was in all this a certain element of humbug no less typically English. The magnates were no disinterested patriots, but in seeking, as they did, to transfer the control of the state machine to a committee of their own order, they were pursuing what was to be their constant endeavour for centuries. It was, in fact, the beginning of the party struggle that has gone on to this day. A modern general election is no more than a bloodless fight to control the administration.

But the attempt to put a baronial government in power was the part of the Charter that never got to work. John, while he lived, was capable of seeing to that. What survived, what was again and again confirmed as the rule of the game between Sovereign and subjects, bore the stamp of immortality because it so perfectly expressed what was germinating in the soul of the nation. And in truth the Magna Charta that has lived through the ages and made history may be summed up in four all-embracing propositions :

(1) "No free man shall be taken, or imprisonêd, or dispossessed, or outlawed, or in any way destroyed . . . save through the lawful judgment of his equals, and the law of the land." ¹

(2) "To no man will we sell, to none deny or put off right, or justice." ²

(3) We undertake to live, like any one of our subjects, within our lawful income, or if we want more, to apply for it to the Common Council of our Kingdom, duly summoned for the purpose. ³

(4) The other fifty-six clauses—all that matters or endures of them—are but variations on the theme that a free Englishman's concrete liberties are sacred and inviolate not only against his King but—what is perhaps the most surprising feature of the whole Charter—against his immediate feudal superior.

¹ Clause 39.

² Clause 40.

³ Paraphrase Clauses 12 and 14.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

It is as easy as it is irrelevant for anyone with the least smattering of medieval knowledge to point out that what the average Baron understood by his liberties resembled the right of the big boy to take it out of his fags without interference from the housemaster, that the Common Council of the Kingdom was a feudal court of tenants in chief, and so on and so forth. But a man must be very insensitive not to realize that the mind behind the drafting of the Charter was one that soared far above the factiousness of the hour. Those grand essential clauses were large enough to comprehend the liberties of Englishmen as they grew from seed to fruition. They were such that the Parliamentarians of the seventeenth and the Whigs of the eighteenth century could make them the corner-stone of their political faith ; such that they could inspire the framers of the American Constitution. It was in them that England may be said to have made the discovery of her own soul.

Shakespeare, it has been again and again pointed out, was able to write a play of King John without ever mentioning Magna Charta. But what is even more remarkable is that without mentioning it, he should have embodied its spirit so consummately in the lines that serve for the conclusion of the whole drama :

Nought shall make us rue
If England to itself do rest but true.

For that was what the Charter meant, and would continue to mean. Whatever other nations might do, England would keep true to herself ; if she grew, it would be from her own roots—she would accept no grafted civilization, no alien law, even from Rome itself. King John must abide by the law of good King Henry, who had but confirmed that of good King Edward, which was the good old law inherited from Alfred, who, in his wisdom, had confessed his unwillingness to tamper with the law as he had received it. To redress the Englishman's grievances, you must convince him that you are putting the clock not forward, but back.

NOLUMUS LEGES ANGLIÆ MUTARE

Twenty-one years after the Charter was sealed, its informing spirit was condensed by a Council, or Parliament, of magnates convened at Merton on the occasion of King Henry III's wedding into one historic phrase :

"*Nolumus leges Angliæ mutare*"—" We won't change the laws of England."

What is most significantly English about it is that far from being a considered statement of abstract principle, it is thrown off on some comparatively minor issue concerning the law of bastardy. It is the voice of John Bull himself growling out that his old English way, with all its twists and windings, is good enough for him, and too good to be by-passed by a pack of foreigners with their Roman straight cuts and scientific engineering.

In mental fight, the Waterloos and Marnes have often attracted less attention than skirmishes. Looking back on it now, we can see that the decision on which the destinies of English, and world civilization, turned was sought, not on the field, but in law courts and lecture halls. Right to the end of the Middle Ages, and beyond, the Roman Law, like the disembodied spirit of the Empire, was insinuating itself into dominance of the leading European nations. That the Latin West should have gravitated back to it was in the course of nature ; what was of portentous and tragic import was that by gradual and piecemeal penetration it should have made a conquest of Germany, the very seedground and stronghold of barbaric freedom. It was the more extraordinary when we reflect that the very anarchy that reduced the German Cæsar, on the fall of the great imperial House of Hohenstaufen, to a shadow without sovereignty, made the way clear for the principles of Cæsarism, applied by a multitude of petty Cæsars, who, in some distant and evil day for Europe, might coalesce into one.

Much, and infinitely more than any prophet could foresee, would depend on whether this same Roman law, this rule of centralized efficiency that is the death of freedom, would round off its dominion by making a

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

conquest of England. To which, indeed, it came near enough. While Stephen and the Empress were fighting for the Crown, students at the budding University of Oxford were flocking to the lectures of a certain Vacarius, who brought from his native Lombardy the knowledge of the Emperor Justinian's great, final recension of the Civil Law, which must have seemed the *ne plus ultra* of juristic wisdom. What sort of principles were being insinuated into the English mind we may gather from the fact that Vacarius explicitly laid it down that all laws originate in the Emperor, that he has the sole right to interpret them, while he himself (and by implication any other sovereign) is not bound by them. What a god-send these principles might have been to the great Plantagenet Sovereigns needs no pointing out.

And yet the English spirit does—in defiance of all apparent probability—prove strong enough to prevent this from happening. The law dispensed by the King's courts ; the law consecrated by the Great Charter ; the law that the growing nationalist party asserts against the Crown, and that it refuses to have changed, is not the Imperial Law of Rome but the Common Law of England.

Already in the time of Henry III and under the fostering care of the judges, that law has acquired such toughness and consistency of fibre that there can be no question of uprooting it. And already this is being recognized as a growth peculiar to England. No less an authority than the great Justice Bracton, whose exposition of English Law may be said to mark its coming of age, can in the middle of the thirteenth century, lay down the difference of England from "almost all other regions", to consist in her reliance upon unwritten law and custom, that oak-like trunk upon which written statutes, when they come, will have to be grafted, and to whose nature they must perforce be assimilated.

For the Common Law stands revealed as proceeding from the English nature, in nothing more than this calculated inexpressiveness. Since the days when it

NOLUMUS LEGES ANGLIÆ MUTARE

began to take shape in the King's Courts, it has defied codification. It has drawn its sap from roots thrust deep beneath the national consciousness ; it is not a manufactured but a growing product, the creation, to an extent unparalleled in Europe, of its own judges, whose decisions, even thus early, were being embalmed and embedded in an ever-accumulating complex of precedent. And for this very reason it is the most tyrant-proof law on earth. Roman law is like a perfectly contrived mechanism that responds to the lightest touch on the controls : the will of Cæsar is his law, and his law is its instrument. But the Cæsar has yet to be born who can pluck an oak out of the ground, and twist it into any shape convenient for his purpose.

It is towards the end of the thirteenth century that the already powerful brotherhood of the law begins to organize itself in the Inns of Court, and it has already acquired an authority and prestige that make it next to impossible to get any considerable change accomplished except at its tempo and by its good will. Gone already were the days when the King would make new law by the simple process of inventing appropriate writs for different kinds of action. The Common Law had become such a complex of traditions and precedents as to be invincible, because impenetrable—a lawyer's preserve. England is as lawyer-ridden as Spain has been priest- or Prussia soldier-ridden. But the power of the lawyer has, in the long run, acted, as nothing else could, as a preservative of the Englishman's liberties and hence, in the long run, of his liberty.

This may seem a strange saying when we think of the way in which the Common Law was actually administered in the courts. Liberty was the last thing that troubled the mind of the King's judges, and we might be tempted to say the same of what a layman would call justice. The success of an action depended less on its merits than the accurate observance, by counsel, of an esoteric ritual of quibble and quiddity, unintelligible except to its initiates.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Many and many an English litigant has had reason to echo that cry from the heart which is the title of the original *John Bull*, "The Law is a bottomless pit," and to sigh for the smooth and logical procedure devised by the great jurists of Rome.

And yet this heartless and procrastinating way of the law, that seemed solely devised to enrich the lawyer's-guild at the expense of its clients, did remain true to the British nature out of which its virtues no less than its defects had arisen. Roman law was in the last resort of the will of the Sovereign. In English law neither King nor magnate nor reason of state could prevail against anything whatever to which the humblest suitor could convince the court that he had a right. The judges were there to see that he got it. In the old legal treatises we are constantly hearing of the two imaginary plain citizens, John Doe and Richard Roe. And it is no exaggeration to say that whereas Roman Law starts from Cæsar downwards, so does the English Common Law repose upon the rights of these great twin brethren against each other and all the world ; inviolate, says the Charter, save through *the lawful judgment of his equals and the law of the land*.

It matters after all very little whether the Barons themselves, or even the Archbishop—and we can hardly imagine such stately and magnificent wording to have originated in any lesser mind—had any conscious intention of embodying the principle of the jury in the Charter. Embodied it was ; the principle, that is to say of making the people trustees of their own rights, and engaging not only their consent but their active co-operation in the affairs that most concern them ; proceeding, as we might say, from the bottom upwards.

It was a principle that went to the very foundations of national life. If the royal courts had, from the first, made fullest use of it, it was by no means their monopoly. Even the local lords were by no means such arbitrary tyrants in practice as they were in theory, and it is

NOLUMUS LEGES ANGLIÆ MUTARE

extremely significant that one of the effects of the Roman influence on the English legal mind was to degrade the theoretical status of the villein, or small peasant farmer attached to an estate, to one based on the law of slavery. But as a matter of fact the typical estate, or manor, was less like a slave plantation than a kingdom in miniature, with its own Common Law—only it was called the custom of the manor—which was declared and administered in the lord's court by the tenants themselves. From the many records of these courts that have survived we know not only that the last farthing of every payment and the last minute of every service that the lord could demand was strictly regulated by custom, but that it was left entirely to the general body of tenants in court to declare what that custom might be, and whether, and how much, in any particular instance, it had been violated. The lord's bailiff, seated with his clerk on the dais, did indeed preside, but more in the capacity of chairman than of judge.

No doubt a lord who chose to trample on the custom of his manor, and openly fleece his villeins, might have got away with it in the King's courts ; but such a possibility would hardly have occurred to the toughest lord, for the always compelling reason, in England, that such things were not done. Nor would it have paid him if he had done it. Without goodwill the almost self-sufficing organization of the manor could never have been kept running. And the villeins, if pressed far enough, were capable of something more than passive resistance—even of burning the manor itself.

The King was no more than the lord of a nation-wide manor. On him too lay the necessity of securing the popular consent on which every monarch, not backed by a professional army of overwhelming strength, has got to rely. But with the English people, such consent will never be unconditional. To submit passively to the will of a ruler, be he god, be he hero, is not in John Bull's nature. It is *his* will to be governed by the custom of the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

estate, which, in plain English, is the Common Law of the land. And of that custom, and of his appertaining rights, he himself will be the guardian.

A wise ruler will grasp this and act accordingly. Even the Conqueror had condescended to the method of inquest by jury, that is to say by the people themselves, in ascertaining their customary rights and liabilities, and in so doing had put his foot upon the royal road that leads to full active partnership of Sovereign and people. But that road is one of those typically English, corkscrew lanes, winding gingerly round the edges of John Doe's and Richard Roe's strips of property, and not like those magnificent roads abroad that hold their course in one unswerving line to the horizon, and of which it is said that they all lead to Rome.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT TOUCHES ALL

With the sealing of Magna Charta, English patriotism registered its decisive victory. It was not only that England had felt the quickening, in her womb, of that by which one day all nations of the earth would be blessed, the new freedom that is beyond empire, but that in the most immediate and obvious sense she had begun to acquire a pride in herself, a confident and self-assertive egotism that is always the first stage of patriotism and only too often the last. The long reign of Henry. III, John's infant son who succeeded him the year after the Charter, sees the complete triumph of this spirit in the country ; a nationalist party gathering behind it an overwhelming force of national sentiment, advancing from strength to strength until all the key positions of the country, from the throne downwards, are its own, and the opposition—such as it is—has almost ceased to exist.

This patriotism is a thing so clear and obvious that it is amazing how anybody can be blind to it. There is nothing subtle or even specifically feudal about it—its simplicity is that of sheer melodrama, starting, as it does, with a patriot hero of as straightforward a stamp as Cincinnatus or Garibaldi, Hubert de Burgh, a magnate of the baronial order whose glory it was, as governor of Dover Castle, to have wrecked the last foreign invasion of England. A French army held in the Midlands ; another crossing The Straits to reinforce it ; Hubert galloping along the coast to rally the fisherfolk of the Cinque Ports with “ If this folk lands, England is lost ! ”, enjoining them, if he should be captured, to let him swing rather than yield the “ key of England ” ; leading his scratch fleet to such a victory, in mid-Channel, as would have

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

rejoiced the heart of Nelson—is not the patriotism of this enough to warm the heart of a schoolboy? It was certainly intelligible enough to the poor English smith who, long years afterwards when Hubert had fallen into disgrace with an unpatriotic court, defied Majesty itself to make him strike irons on the man who had saved England.

We cannot expect the plot to be maintained at this high level of theatricality. Collective egotism usually turns out to have roots in egotism rather less collective. The most primitive patriotism is a trinity—My God, my country, and my pocket. So now, with the barons trying to get control of the administration, and refusing to fight in order to reconquer overseas provinces; the towns, with London at their head, agitating for the protection of their trade and industry; even the Churchmen drawing the line at foreigners jobbed into the pick of English benefices and their Church sucked dry of its revenues in the interests of Papal power politics—what with piety and selfishness, the false love and the true contending for mastery, England is beginning to find herself, to acquire a personality and atmosphere of her own.

For already there is becoming perceptible a certain idiosyncrasy, a something different in the English soul from those of other nations. It is a tendency suggested rather than defined, not yet to liberty of speech or thought—these would have been highly shocking—but displayed in a certain intractability and cussedness, a refusal to march in step. It is what is already beginning to distinguish English from French architecture in this high springtide of pointed Gothic. Nothing will persuade English stones to combine in that disciplined unity of aspiration that is the achievement of Rheims and Amiens. English Gothic is not logical, does not rely for its effect upon one towering concentration; it offers itself to enjoyment at leisure and in detail. Nor is there any reason to put it on an inferior level; the excellence of both

WHAT TOUCHES ALL

styles is according to the success with which they embody the native genius.

It is the same with English thought, no longer content to remain under tutelage, but making its proper contribution to that age's sum of intellectual activity. The most daring and original of European minds in the thirteenth century is beyond question that of the Franciscan, Roger Bacon, which, in its strength and weakness, is English almost to the point of caricature. Brother Roger appears to have had an almost sensuous delight in advertising his contempt for authority, and to have got himself into perpetual hot water thereby. In his groping and often blundering fashion he set out to break clean away from the thought of those mighty but barren logicians, the doctors of the schools ; to cut their metaphysical cackle and embrace nature in the buff. Facts ! facts ! not what the authorities and systems may have laid down in advance, but whatever tough and gritty material one may chance to unearth, and then proceed to drop into the intricate, delicate, logical mechanism. Concrete facts are as sacred to John Bull as concrete rights ; his mind is that of the eternal Protestant, detestable to the Latin, with his tradition of ordered unity. On the whole it seems that Paris dealt remarkably mercifully with Bacon in shutting him up, unburnt, for a beggarly ten years.

And when, in the ensuing century, England does produce a schoolman of invincible orthodoxy, the Oxonian "Invincible Doctor", William of Occam, the one sentence of his voluminous writings that survives is "get rid of entities"—that is to say, "Quit your damnable abstractions and get down to brass tacks." On which ground John Bull will take his intellectual stand throughout all subsequent generations.

The hedgehog- or oak-like quality so conspicuous in Roger Bacon is more and more *en evidence* in the leading Englishmen of his time, and particularly in those great churchmen, sprung from English soil, who would

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

have been far better entitled to the appellation "Anglo-Catholic"—with a decided emphasis on the "Anglo"—than its modern claimants. Even the great Archbishop Langton, with his plain English name and nature, though owing his Primacy to the most signal triumph ever obtained by the Holy See over an English sovereign, no longer is found like Becket, standing with his episcopal staff between his English flock and the wolves of a baronial and half-alien tyranny. The wolves are turning to watchdogs, and the shepherd has his work cut out to prevent his employer from fleecing, and almost flaying, the sheep.

For now the idea of a supernational power of a united Christendom standing between the downtrodden Englishman and the "devils and wicked men" of the Conquest had fallen completely out of date. The last of John's criminal shifts had been to sell England herself into vassalage to a spiritual Cæsar, who had ceased to represent anything spiritual, but whose one object was to raise money by any means whatever for financing a war to the death against his partner, the Commander of the Christian Faithful. Indeed, it is a moot point whether the course of history might not have been anticipated by three centuries and the Bishop of Rome have ceased to exercise any authority—or at least any practical authority—in England, had not Rome been saved, in spite of herself, by that faculty she has more than once displayed, when apparently moribund, of renewing her own life from within. The spectacle of her legates and placemen raking in the shekels like so many Shylocks was atoned for by that of her poor friars, in the first pure flame of their enthusiasm, going about like Christ, ministering to the poor and the sick and not knowing themselves where to lay their heads. It is not by chance that the two great mid-century patriot leaders in Church and State, Bishop Grosseteste and Earl Simon de Montfort, are in touch with the Franciscan movement.

WHAT TOUCHES ALL

Never was there so unadulterated a John Bull as this same Grosseteste, born, as he himself tells us, from "a humble father and mother", rising to the Bishopric of Lincoln, and only prevented from rising higher still, into the company of canonized saints, because he missed no opportunity of showing himself "a manifest confuter of Pope and King . . . the hammer and despiser of the Romans"; the sort of man to miss no opportunity to react violently against any sort of authority over him, and yet to lose no opportunity of asserting his own, even to the point of excommunicating his own Dean—one whose personality will certainly wreck any sort of official machinery in which it is expected to function, but whose innate non-conformability is matched with a deep-seated and homely kindness of heart that would seem to be the special contribution of the Anglo-Saxon to the English character. Like Becket, his enemies were among the arrogant and powerful; the common people worshipped him, knowing, as they did, that to them the proud prelate was a kind, elder brother, as ready to take up the cudgels on *their* behalf as his own.

That same sweetness is even more beautifully displayed in another English churchman of the time, bearing the good old Saxon name of Edmund; saint, Primate, and equally, in his gentle way, a confuter of Roman pretensions, one whose memory is fragrant most of all by his acts of thoughtful kindness—a veritable English Father Christmas, and as blithe of heart; the last words he was heard to utter being, "Folks say game (or sport) goes to the womb, but I say now game goes to the heart."

When England produces such champions as this, who can deny that she is finding a soul of her own?

The period of national adolescence that roughly coincides with the reign of Henry III culminates in the great nationalist revolution of 1264 that we associate with the leadership of Earl Simon de Montfort. After that we can fairly regard the whole of the rest of the Middle Ages, till the fall of the last Plantagenet, more

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

than two centuries later, as the simple realization in detail of what has already been outlined in principle, or as a piece of music founded on the elaboration of one or two themes that have been clearly stated in the opening bars.

If we can assign a date for the coming of age of the English nation, we should put it in the January of the following year, 1265, when Earl Simon, who, at the head of a coalition very similar to that of Magna Charta, had overthrown his brother-in-law, Henry III, and was acting as virtual Sovereign, summoned to Westminster a Parliament that included not only representatives from the shires, but also from a number of selected boroughs. It is true that he was principally anxious to whip up a rally of his own partisans ; but his party was so emphatically that of the nation as to make such an assembly representatively national.

And yet neither by birth nor temperament was there anything English about this thoroughly representative Frenchman, with his clear-cut mind and his blend of chivalrous idealism with uncompromising ruthlessness. He was just the man to concentrate the nationalist influences that had been gathering force during the previous fifty years into one resistless drive to power, but never one who, once in power, could have held England. His very nationalism was too radical ; his way of grappling with a situation had a breath-taking directness quite alien to English notions of decorum. Within little more than a year his regime had collapsed and he was a dead man. But nothing essential in his work perished with him. The revolution he had wrought had come to stay, and its leadership was merely taken over by his conqueror, the Prince who was to succeed in six years' time as Edward I and who stood forth in his people's eye as no vicegerent of Rome, like his father, but a true patriot king. This was a part which he was far better qualified to sustain than Simon. For whatever blood may have run in his veins, and whatever language

WHAT TOUCHES ALL

he may have spoken, there was never a more thorough-going Englishman than this bearer of a royal English name, English in nothing more typically than a sense of fair dealing that caused him to glory in the motto, "Keep pact," coupled with a holy determination to exact his rights, under any formal pact, to the last letter and the last farthing. That a Scot or a Welshman should dare to lift a patriotic hand against him outraged his moral sense; he felt about Sir William Wallace much as conscientious diehards felt about Sir Roger Casement. An impetuous, hard-slogging, plain-spoken man, with no nonsense about him, he was all that plain John Bull expected a king to be.

It was of an importance that can hardly be overestimated, that just such a man as this should have been at the head of affairs during the thirty-five critical years of his reign. For the whole subsequent course of English history might be determined by the way in which things shaped themselves while all was still in a balance whose slightest tilt, one way or the other, would be decisive of her future destiny.

And if we are told that the idea of a patriot King at the head of a united nation was completely unfeudal or unmedieval, we may let Edward speak for himself, and we can easily visualize the scene, since it was from a platform that he had specially caused to be set up in front of Westminster Hall, with the Abbey opposite. It was an hour of national crisis, the worst that Edward ever had to face. He was in the throes of a French war; King Philip, in his own words ¹ "has beset my realm with a great fleet and a great multitude of warriors, and purposes, if his power equal his unrighteous design, to blot out the English tongue from the face of the earth." He proposed to do an unprecedented thing, to take with him no feudal levy, but that of the whole nation, for a grand combined operation overseas. And he was faced with an opposition that might at any moment flame up into civil war. Baronial forces were indeed concentrated

¹ Actually written a few months later *apropos* the same situation.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

round London, but whether to follow the King or to fight him was at best doubtful ; everyone knew how His Majesty had roared at the Earl Marshal, " By God, Sir Earl, you shall either go or hang ! " and got it straight back, " By God, Sir King, I will neither go nor hang ! " And the King must needs, at this very moment, be in the throes of a first class dispute with the Church ; the Archbishop of Canterbury having taken the cue from a megalomaniac Pontiff in denying any taxes whatever from the clergy, and Edward having intimated in his blunt English way that, until the clergy chose to pay for the protection of the laws, they could all consider themselves outlaws and take the consequences.

And here was Edward, with that same archbishop at his side, facing a crowd that must have included as many of his " brave men of London " as could by any possibility quit their ordinary avocations. The King had chosen this way of appealing to his people over the heads of his disloyal factions, and there he towered above them, a magnificent figure of a man, with his little son by his side—a touch exquisitely calculated to appeal to an English crowd. With passionate gestures, and tears pouring down his cheeks, he stripped his heart before them ; he owned that he had not governed as well as he might, he knew that he had broken the rules of the game between Sovereign and tax-payer ; but he wanted them to realize that every penny had been to save them from enemies bent on their destruction. " And now," he cried, " I am going to put myself in danger for you. If I come back, receive me "—he must have been shouting at this point, we can almost hear the applause, " as you are doing now—I'll restore everything I have taken ; but if I don't come back—crown my son ! "

No wonder the London crowd was carried off its feet ; no wonder that the air was rent with shouts and that a forest of uplifted hands rose beneath the platform ; even the surly Archbishop being carried away with the rest, and sobbing out assurances of fealty.

WHAT TOUCHES ALL

That was the sort of ruler Edward was, one whose love went out to his people as it had to his "*chère reine*" of the Eleanor crosses, and who, like all great lovers, yearned to commune with his beloved face to face and heart to heart. But the method of the public platform is plainly an imperfect way of getting into touch with all England from Berwick to the Lizard. The King could only hope to do that in his High Court of Parliament, and the more representative he could make it of the nation, the better for his need. "What touches all," he laid down, that same autumn, "must be approved by all," and in that "all" lies the crux of the problem. For unless the voice of Parliament can, by one means or another, be made fairly representative of that indefinable thing that we call the voice of the nation, Parliament is indeed a growth without roots, doomed to wither before it has borne fruit.

Professor Pollard, the greatest of all authorities on the subject, sees in Parliament the peculiar (and by implication the sole) means by which the English people achieved their unity and nationality. It was without doubt the chief means by which unity was cemented and nationality fostered, but with all deference I would add that without a unity and nationality already in advance of any other contemporary people, England would never have achieved Parliament nor, having achieved it, have preserved it alive.

Simon's Parliament was swept, as we might say, to Westminster on the crest of wave of nationalism, and Edward, who completed Simon's work of putting Parliament on that English way from which it was never to part, did so by stepping into his shoes, with all the added prestige of royal authority, as nationalist leader.

And if we ask in what it was that this way of an English Parliament came to differ from that of similar bodies abroad that failed to hold the course, the answer is that this English way came near enough to being that of the nation, the whole nation and nothing but the nation, to

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

foreshadow John Pym's comparison of Parliament to the soul of which the nation was the body.

We see what might have happened so easily, by what did happen everywhere else. For it takes much more than the mere process of election to make Parliament representative of a nation. Most people have enough chemistry to know the difference between a mixture and a compound ; and how it is possible to put oxygen and hydrogen into the same container without making them water. For Parliament to be national its elements have got to be fully compounded ; the soul of it must be one.

Now this is just what did not happen in those significantly named foreign assemblies of estates. The compounding was indeed done, but it was not the compounding of the whole mass. It was as if a number of separate compounds were tied together, or several souls possessed the same body.

The division might be vertical, or horizontal, or both. The nation, as in Germany and the Spanish Peninsula, might never get itself properly united ; the different parts might retain an overmastering sense of local and separate nationality, that their Parliaments would only tend to keep alive. Even in our own day, Spain has been torn asunder because to a Catalonian, for instance, a free Catalonia is even more worth preserving than a united Spain ; while as for Germany, she has only achieved unity by having every vestige of freedom stamped out under the heel of a jack boot. From this danger the effect of the Norman conquest, and the strength of the Norman Kings, saved England. Even the memory of the old separate kingdoms was wellnigh obliterated, and the government was strong enough to prevent the great feudatories from becoming petty kings on their own account. There were no provincial Parliaments in England, as there were even in France, except when, in a moment of strange aberration, Edward I experimented with two separate Parliaments, North and South of the Humber, on the model, one would suppose, of

WHAT TOUCHES ALL

the two Archiepiscopal provinces. But the experiment was never repeated, though for quite a long time the North did tend to think and act together as if it retained some faint memories of having once been the suzerain kingdom of England.

There was an even greater danger of a horizontal fissure into rigidly exclusive "estates", hermetically sealed compartments of a class consciousness, that could never be fused into nationality. You could not, in any true sense of the word, describe an Estates General as a Parliament, but rather as a concourse, or congress of parliaments, each pulling its own way and therefore easily made by any competent Sovereign to cancel each other out.

England alone, of any country that mattered, escaped their fate, and she so narrowly that even her historians, up to a very recent period, talked about the estates of her realm as if there really had been such things, in the Continental sense. It took Dr. Pollard's masterpiece¹ to dissipate the last remnants of that fallacy.

It is said that an Englishman loves a lord. That may well be ; but only because the lordliness of lords never has been a serious enough proposition in England to create a plebeian inferiority complex. For in medieval times it was about as difficult to know who was a lord as it is nowadays to know who is a gentleman, for the title was as freely applied, by way of courtesy, as that of esquire is to-day. You might, as Dr. Pollard has shown, be a lord for one purpose and a knight for another. You might even preside over the Upper Chamber—as Sir Thomas More did—without any more claim to be a lord than "me lud" has to-day when he is off the bench.

Whatever may be said about the class consciousness of the average Englishman, there is no country where there has been such indiscriminate class mixture. Never was there anything corresponding to the blue blood of the Continent, never an unclimbable fence, between those within and those without the pale of noblesse or gentility.

¹ *The Evolution of Parliament.*

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Your title like your estate appertained to yourself alone, and if it survived your death, remained strictly entailed in line of primogeniture. But the blood that ran in your veins, be you Duke, be you Lord, was as that of other men, and contained no magic or virtue that could be transmitted to your posterity.

But abroad it was different. There nobility was not sterile ; there blueness of blood was allowed to create an artificial species of men, set apart from the common herd, with special privileges and a superiority rigidly defined, preserved by in-breeding, and sufficient unto itself without what Lord Melbourne would have called any damned nonsense about merit. The effect of this in time would be to put the common herd under what was, in effect, a domination of foreigners.

Why this obstinately refused to happen in England, why all attempts to define even the status of a gentleman never succeeded in cutting any practical ice, is a thing for which, as far as I know, there has never been any serious attempt to account. There is probably no simple explanation. No doubt the same national spirit that has inspired the Common Law makes John Bull abhor caste as nature abhors a vacuum. Much also must be conceded to the unique train of circumstances following on the Conquest. The Norman Kings, in alliance with the English nation, were strong enough to prevent a feudal baronage from ever getting a proper start except during the abhorred and never-to-be-repeated anarchy of Stephen's reign. But when the Kings did at last forsake the alliance with the people for that with the Pope, they were still strong enough to drive the Baronage to seek that self-same popular alliance, and function, not as a caste, but nationally. Last, but not least, we must give credit to the fostering genius, in the most critical period, of those two master nation-builders, Simon and Edward.

Account for it as we will, this thing, of such vital moment, did happen. By the end of the thirteenth century England had attained that stage of development in which

WHAT TOUCHES ALL

it was possible to speak of her in the fullest sense as one individual organism and not a mere colony or agglomeration of lives centred in themselves. The parts remained and lived, but only as the cells and corpuscles live in the body, in subordination and membership.

The critical decision, if we can speak thus of something that came about by instinct more than contrivance, had been taken when the body of that nobility came apart in the middle. The magnates whom the King summoned individually to his Court in Parliament, not so much in virtue of their rank as of their function as councillors, tended to amalgamate with the other high dignitaries and officials, ecclesiastical and lay, who, in the same capacity, formed an inner ring round the throne. But the rest of the nobility and gentry, the "minor barons" who attended as representatives of their counties, from the very first gravitated into alliance and union with those pursy burgesses who for several generations were content to play second fiddle in the partnership.

The connecting link in that partnership was the younger son, who plays almost as important a role in English history as he does in fairy tales. For the lord, or squire, being incapable of passing on either his estate or his status to more than one heir, turned the rest of his progeny loose on the world to seek their fortunes in any way, or any company, that might offer. This had a number of important effects, one of them being the British Empire, which was to no small extent the creation of younger sons, and another a fund of human energy capable of supplying leaderships in almost every department of national life. What we are concerned with here, however, is the way in which the going forth of these adventurers into so many spheres of activity—and even the apprentice's bench was not always despised—was the most effective means conceivable of keeping the classes fluid, and preventing the formation of anything like a caste of the well born.

The country gentleman, if we may anticipate the habit

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

of a later age in thus designating the substantial but not noble landowner, may thus claim to have made a notable contribution, in the shape of his offspring, to national unity. But he contributed equally in his own person to making that unity worthy to be called national ; for it would have been an ill bargain had it been achieved by saddling the nation with an all-powerful bureaucracy. Alongside the younger son, there arises in the fourteenth century the hardly less significant and uniquely English figure of the Justice of the Peace, that is to say the independent landowner taking upon his own shoulders the work, that would otherwise have had to be performed by royal officials, of local administration and petty justice. It was really the supreme application of the jury principle. For the Bench of Justices differed from a feudal baronage in the fact that its members no longer wielded power in their own individual right, but in a public capacity as the representative men of the neighbourhood, none the less truly representative from being nominated instead of elected.

The handing over of the governorship and judgeship of each district, in all but the greatest matters, to committees of its gentry, was an expedient that had its own dangers ; but than which no more powerful safeguard could have been devised against both a royal and a feudal tyranny. The Justice functioned as an official of the King, but the kind of official who could never be made to function officially. He might be appointed from above, but he had his roots in the soil. Consequently the administrative machine could not be made responsible through all its parts to the touch of a controlling hand, as a good machine ought to be. In fact the very word machine in such circumstances becomes a misnomer. The English Constitution is neither invented nor contrived, but grows with the living soul of the nation.

Long before the dawn of the modern age it had become apparent that civilization in England had taken a way of

WHAT TOUCHES ALL

its own that was already beginning to diverge fundamentally from that of the mainland. The great, silent issue that had to be decided was whether, in fact as well as in form, John Bull was going to return to his Roman allegiance ; whether he was going to allow himself to be civilized up to the Roman standard, and to take his place as a provincial on the outskirts of a spiritual empire. By the middle of the fourteenth century, it might have begun to dawn upon an exceptionally acute and well-informed observer that John Bull was, at heart, an intractable barbarian ; that such Romanization as he had taken on was but a veneer. The decisive test had been whether he would take from Rome that which was the most essential thing of all, namely, her law, that foundation on which her whole system was built. And he had looked at that consummate product of human wisdom, had taken from it any casual hints or pickings that he happened to fancy, and decided that after all he would hold fast to the illogical and tangled way of his own Common Law, and stand fast on his rights and liberties at whatever cost to the efficiency of the state machine.

And from this decision—taken without his consciously realizing it—all the rest followed. The way of the Common Law, which started from the Man upwards instead of the State downwards, led to the characteristically English application of the jury principle to so many purposes—Parliament itself has been likened to a jury of the nation—and finally to the decentralization of government by substituting the local gentry for state officials. The Englishman never paid the conscious homage that the Jew did to his law, and yet it played a hardly less important part in his national life.

CHAPTER IX

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

The impulse to expand is beyond reason. It would seem that when nations have achieved an overplus of prosperity beyond what is required to keep life going on a hand to mouth basis, they can never rest content with the progressive improvement of life within their own frontiers. Their will to power dominates every other consideration ; they are like plants in a tropic forest possessed of a ceaseless blind lust for light and space at the expense of their neighbours. And they proceed on the crude assumption that a nation increases its power automatically with every expansion of its circumference, instead of bringing the strain on its resources nearer and nearer to the point of exhaustion.

If any proof were wanted of the growth of England into a nation during the thirteenth century, it would be the way that during its last quarter she is already bitten by this lust for expansion. Edward I is not only the modeller of her Parliamentary institutions, but takes his place as the first of the long line of her empire builders. It is true that there had been what might have been described as a dynastic empire under the kings who had gone before him, but it was in no true sense of the word English, and English patriotism, when it began to form, grudged every penny demanded by the Crown for its recovery in arms.

But about Edward I's conquests the country felt differently. This may at first sight seem strange, since in outward form he was merely treading in the steps of his fathers. He clung to what was left, in the shape of Gascony, of their French inheritance, and his claims to the rest of the British Isles, beyond the borders of England, were put forward solely on personal and feudal grounds,

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

as if he were a litigious landowner claiming some adjoining estate.

But we shall never understand medieval man if we persist in judging him by the forms in which he not only clothed, but was an adept at disguising, his real motives. If we look beneath the surface we shall perceive that the spirit of this new policy is—what the old had so conspicuously failed to be—national. Edward was, in fact, pursuing a power policy as ruthless as that of any modern dictator, and as English as that of Chatham or Canning. Gascony was only a piece on his chessboard, and he was aiming at a triple alliance in which Gascony wines, Flemish cloth, and English wool should play reciprocating parts—for upon the looms of Flanders the great English baronial and monastic estates depended for their markets, and the merchant guilds in the towns for the best of their commerce. Once let the French King capture, as he was perpetually trying to do, the Flemish market, and disaster would follow in England as certainly as night follows day. The feeling, that so long persisted, of France and England being natural enemies was based on the solidest grounds, and when Edward made that passionate appeal for support for his French expedition, he knew well that his London audience would understand what he meant about his putting himself in danger on their behalf.

But this Continental policy was probably secondary in Edward's mind to his grand object—inevitable in a strong king at the head of a united nation—of welding the whole of Britain, and in fact of the British Isles, into the self-same national unity. From the standpoint of power politics, the argument for this was overwhelming—certainly as far as Britain was concerned. For to a power naturally insular, the existence of land frontiers was an unmitigated nuisance. Edward himself had only too good reason to know what aid and comfort a hostile Wales was capable of giving to any enemy of the English Crown—for Earl Simon's last campaign had been based

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

on Welsh support, and Edward was not the man to forget things of that kind. As for Scotland, that menace for several generations had been no more than potential, but sooner or later it was bound to become actual. English policy had played for a peaceful union of crowns by process of marriage, and when this failed it was only natural for Edward to take advantage of a disputed succession to convert what had been a shadowy feudal claim into an effective suzerainty over the successful candidate.

All of which feudal stuff signified just about as much, or as little, as the sort of bogus ethnology by which the Totalitarian states of to-day justify their pursuit of the main chance. To have Scotland a vassal State suited Edward's, and England's, interest extremely well ; and to proceed at the first sign of recalcitrance from suzerainty to open conquest, even better.

To recognize this is in no way to justify power policy, either in Edward's day or our own, even from its own standpoint of sacred egotism. Egomania, in nations as in men, is a disease ; a form of insanity, homicidal and kleptomaniac, that renders the victim a mortal peril to his neighbours, but which, like hydrophobia, is an even greater danger to the victim. Only this particular form of insanity is masked by a cunning that, being devoid of wisdom, ends by defeating its own purposes. Or if it succeeds, it is only when it is armed with such overwhelming force that it is able to obliterate the consequences of its own actions. If, that is to say, the consequences of action can ever be evaded, which is by no means certain.

We can regard the whole of England's expansion and contraction, from Edward I's first expedition into Wales to the final collapse, 176 years later, of the English attempt to conquer France, as one single movement, like the rise and fall of a wave. The whole national strength that had accumulated during the long, invasion-free reign of Henry III is put forth in a mighty effort to unite France

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

and the British Isles under the same Crown ; an effort by which dazzling victories are won, but which exhausts itself and whose net result is to leave England with Wales and Calais in exchange for Gascony, and for these insignificant territorial adjustments to have inflicted a net loss upon Christian civilization impossible to compute. For every one of the peoples concerned had suffered spiritual detriment far more serious and lasting than any material damage incidental to wars of conquest and liberation.

I have spoken of Edward I as the first of English empire builders ; for it was by his initiative that England entered on the first of her three phases of expansion, which we might call the insular-continental, the second being that of the colonial Empire, and the third the British Commonwealth of Nations. As is the way of imperialists, he had committed his country to an undertaking of whose magnitude he himself cannot have had the least conception, but upon which, once embarked, it would be impossible to draw back. For in the net of his power politics he himself was caught, and his successors after him.

The one thing that was fairly in his power was to do over again the task that the Romans had accomplished with comparative ease more than a thousand years before, but which had baffled the rulers of England ever since their departure, that of bringing back Wales to her English allegiance. Upon that small and poor, but difficult country, he was able to concentrate overwhelming force, which, thanks largely to the lucky chance of the gallant Prince, who was the soul of the Welsh resistance, being killed in a chance skirmish, did manage to impose the same sort of military peace there had been in Roman times. Even so, the national spirit of Wales was merely smouldering, and in little more than a century had burst out again in such flame as to demand a second English conquest. As late as the eighteenth century Wales remained at least a potential focus of any rebellion that might be in prospect against the Government at London.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Still, we may enter Wales as the one permanent gain that the first British Empire has to show. The whole of the rest of the story is, as far as it is humanly possible to compute these things, one of waste and bloodshed unspeakable, exacted from seven generations, and with a great deal less than nothing to show for it, except perhaps in certain of its indirect effects.

As I have implied, Edward in his venture into power politics had involved himself in a chain of consequences of which he cannot have had the slightest conception. With the enormous prize of Scotland apparently ready to fall like ripe fruit into his hands, he would have felt himself a fool not to have stretched them out. There was only one thing that he had left out of account—and for that we can hardly blame him, since a consensus of expert authority still denies its having existed—the force of national sentiment. The Kingdom of Scotland was still very far behind that measure of unity that had been achieved in England, but the Scot, and particularly the Lowland Scot, was the last man in the world to sit down tamely under the rule of a Southerner, or even to see his own King meekly taking his orders from the English overlord. Nor had Edward the diplomatic tact that such a situation demanded. Like the true Englishman he was, he was out for his rights, and deemed the letter of feudal law, provided it was on his side, good enough for him and for everyone else concerned.

Whatever remote chance there might have been of his making an English suzerainty effective was defeated by his commitments elsewhere. He was caught in the net of his own policy. For the Flemish market was as important to the Scottish as the English wool grower, and French influence happened to be enough in the ascendent there to make access to that market dependent on the French alliance. Thus the Scot was hit not only in his pride but in his pocket by the English connection. The result was that Scotland, which for more than a century had given no trouble, became the active and permanent ally of France,

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

always liable to attack England in the rear as soon as her main force was engaged overseas. There was nothing for it now but for Edward, having landed himself in this entanglement, to hack his way through, and hold Scotland as he did Wales. But Scotland was not Wales, and England's resources were no more equal to its permanent subjugation than those of Rome had been, especially now that a hostile France could compel her to face two ways at once. The fact that Edward was the most redoubtable soldier of his time only prolonged the agony—victory, conquest, revolt, victory, conquest, revolt, and the old king dying *en route* for a third conquest, leaving to his successor a bankrupt treasury and a Scottish ulcer now inflamed and septic.

It is not my intention to write a history of England even in the barest outline, but merely to show how inevitable was the nemesis of a power policy based on nationalism. Few lessons of history are so clear, or so unqualified as this, which has been repeated again and again ; so far, at any rate, as England has been concerned. Rome's way of imposing her peace by force of arms has proved a *via dolorosa* for England, as often as she has tried it.

The reign of the great patriot King was followed by the pitiful tragedy of his son's, who lost his empire, his crown, and finally, in atrocious torture, his life. The man, like so many sons of masterful fathers, had grown up an amiable waster, and for wasters a mediæval throne was indeed a *siege perilous*. But it does not follow that the ablest sovereign could have escaped disaster in so hopeless a situation as that bequeathed by the first Edward to the second. It at least speaks for his good intentions that the new king should have wanted to cut his country's losses on this Scottish venture, and get out of the whole business as cheaply as possible. But once you have got a wolf by the throat, it is not always practicable to relax your grip, nor can the engines of power policy be switched over into reverse without risk of disaster. Even Edward II

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

found himself at last obliged to lead an English army as far, on the path of conquest, as Bannockburn. That overwhelming defeat was in fact a crowning mercy for England no less than Scotland, from the very fact of its being so unqualified and sensational. From henceforward no Scot would ever glean any aftermath of humiliation from his dealings with England. It did not matter that in almost every other major conflict between the two the battle honours went South. When a Scot thought of war with England, he thought of Bruce and Bannockburn. There was no pathos of "Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!", still less of "England's cruel red" about his national songs, but the honest swagger of

What, weened the King of England
To have yget Scotland?
With rumbleow!

But without that Rumbleow no future King of England would ever have got Scotland at all, to keep.

Twenty years of humiliation and comparative quiescence sufficed to settle the account of poor Edward II and, also to allow sufficient head of power to be gathered from a third Edward to take up the dropped threads of his grandfather's policy, with something more than equal ability, if without the same rugged grandeur of personality. For not only was he a statesman of consummate finesse, but the first great master in the field of those defensive tactics based on fire power which have been England's peculiar strength ever since. He had at his command a new weapon that gave its possessor a winning advantage for the next century, the English—or originally Welsh—long bow, which demanded men trained from childhood to its use, and a commander versed in the difficult art of combining his archers with other arms. Such a commander was Edward III; and no man can be imagined more capable of giving the national power policy the best run for his money.

And so the story is repeated on the same lines as before, only with additional complications. Young Edward,

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

applying his new tactical model, shoots to pieces the Scottish main army, and follows his grandfather's precedent of setting up a vassal king at Edinburgh. As before the Franco-Scottish axis comes into play ; economic pressure is again applied by the closing of the Flemish market, and the rising tide of Scottish nationalism submerges the puppet dynasty, Edward this time having his hands too full in France to undertake another reconquest. Flanders is evidently the key of the situation, and Edward now finds himself drawn on into the desperate venture of asserting a claim, through his French mother, to the crown of France, by way of relieving the Flemings of any conscientious scruples about defying their French allegiance. As such a claim could only be enforced through an English conquest of France it is no wonder it should have started a Hundred Years' War—and a bit over.

Very unfortunately, the absurdity of the whole business was masked by the fact that Edward was in possession of an army capable of destroying anything that attacked it in the open. That army was in the fullest sense national ; it had been built up by the policy of successive kings of arming the people, or rather, of compelling them to arm themselves. It was, from the Prince of Wales downwards, a paid army, and therefore disciplined in a sense that no feudal levy could be ; and an army backed by a dominant sea power was an army crudely and robustly patriotic, as we know from such of its songs as have survived—those in particular composed by one Laurence Minot, which are in a strain of swaggering and enemy-strafting Jingoism that would have horrified the men of the last Great War. It was an army capable, when caught at apparently overwhelming disadvantage, of turning on the proud chivalry of France, and shooting it to pieces as effectually as it had shot the columns of Scottish spearmen. There appeared to be nothing on horseback that could stand up to the long bow, and to send the knights waddling forward on foot only made matters worse, as was proved when, in

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

1356, a mere handful of an Anglo-Gascon force destroyed the largest army that France could put into the field and captured her King. A peace, or armistice, patched up shortly afterwards, left England not with the French crown, the claim to which had never been more than a bargaining counter, but an enormous bulge of South-Western France by way of an overseas empire.

Which meant that England was drawn deeper and deeper into the complications of an imperialist policy too crudely against the grain of French national sentiment to last more than a few years. With a singular anticipation of our own times, the Black Prince, Edward's heir, who was viceroy of the annexed provinces, found himself drawn into taking sides in a Spanish, or rather Castilian, civil war, against the candidate backed by France. The usual victory was followed by the usual ingratitude of the Spaniard towards anyone who comes to his assistance; the Black Prince precipitated the revolt of his French subjects by taxing them for the expenses of which his Spanish client had bilked him; the wretched business of the French war started over again, this time with the fatal addition of a Castilian fleet, in the service of the now successful French candidate, intervening to cut England's communications with her new empire. The French, having at last discovered that a yew shaft, though capable of penetrating four inches of wooden door, was no use against a stone wall, retired behind their fortifications and turned the war into one of attrition, with all the advantage on their side. A very few years sufficed to leave Edward worse off than when he had started, and with nothing to show for forty years' waste of his country's blood and resources but the doubtful blessing of a foothold on the French side of the Channel at Calais—a standing temptation to further adventures of a familiar kind.

The rhythm of power politics is monotonous in its repetition. Again we are in the trough of depression, again we have the phenomenon of an unfortunate king done miserably to death after two decades of nominal

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

sovereignty over a disgruntled and disloyal nation. And again we have the same gradual recovery, through quiescence, of sufficient power to start a third dance of death on the now familiar lines.

This second phase of expansion and contraction has, like the first, left its portrait faithfully recorded in stone. It is pre-eminently, in its early, victorious phase, what one naturally associates with the term "decorated". Edward III was, not only by temperament but deliberate policy, the most decorative of English Kings, the leader in a patriotic pageant of chivalry. He was almost as distinguished an actor as he was a tactician ; at one time he would be playing the part of the unknown knight, performing prodigies of valour in a carefully conspicuous incognito ; at another he would be taking the lead, with his queen, in his own world-famous melodrama of the Burghers of Calais. Not content to be merely descended from King Arthur or, like his grandfather, to officiate at the translation of his bones, he would *be* King Arthur, round table and all—and you may still see that piece of stage property at Windsor. And that gesture of the dropped garter, whatever the critics may say, is too patently Edwardian not to be founded on fact. *Honi soit . . .*

A decorative King of a decorative age conducting a decorative war ! And like other leading actors, one of the hardest bitten men of business away from the limelight—for, when we survey the decorative surface of that age through such eyes as those of Sir John Froissart, we are apt to ignore the hard and cruel reality beneath it. It seems such a gentlemanly war, with the leaders on either side vying with each other in courtesies, and with the Black Prince, a true chip of the old block, advertising his capture of the French King by casting himself for the part of waiter at his table. The fact was that the chivalrous knight regarded his captives, in the spirit of the modern kidnapper, as a speculative investment to be handled with all the loving care due to such an asset ; those of them

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

who offered no prospect of returns could be knocked on the head without any sentiment at all. This same chivalrous Prince was the ruffian who could personally superintend the butchery of every man, woman, and child in captured Limoges—except for the characteristic gesture of sparing three gentlemen who were putting up a fight for their lives, and were no doubt more profitable alive than dead.

Let us face the facts, and recognize that in this attempt of England to expand on the Continent we have nothing except the veneer of a feudal romance, and that it is as clear a case of nationalist aggression and *realpolitik*, and directed to as sordid ends, as the German invasion of Belgium or the Italian of Abyssinia. Whatever patriotic credit there is may be taken from the fact that England has been through this phase and, it may be hoped, has got on to something better. Better even from the most selfish point of view would it have been for England, not to speak of France and the rest of Christian Europe, had it been possible for Edward III and his cousin Philip to have got together and hammered out some reasonable compromise about the Flemish market, or had the first Edward been wise enough to aim at a friendly, instead of a subject, Scotland. But the long view is seldom that of practical John Bull, who believes in taking his opportunity when, and as, it offers.

England is at least entitled to whatever consolation may accrue from the fact that whatever damage she may have suffered was far less than that which she inflicted. Her narrow seas, and the command of them that she could usually maintain, enabled her to keep the seat of war away from her own territory, except for the minor nuisance of Scottish diversions in the North. But the effect of the English invasions of France may be read in the almost complete paralysis of French civilization during the fourteenth and a great part of the fifteenth centuries. The glorious epoch of her Gothic art comes to an abrupt close ; there is a great and sterile gap between that and

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

her first flamboyant awakening to the Renaissance. Whereas in England there is a continuous and prolific development from Early English to late Perpendicular ; the fourteenth century in particular being one of sheer creative luxuriance in almost every mode of expression, from building to writing.

If ever there was a time in which we may say that it was merry in England, we should fix it in this century, and particularly in its first half. In men's thoughts and songs it would seem to have been one perpetual maying, in a time when May had not ceased to be springlike. The greenwood, on which men's imaginations loved to dwell, was alive with the song of cuckoos, and the home of that most representative of all English figures, the jolly outlaw, Robin Hood, sportsman and individualist, the terror of constituted authority, but the friend of the under-dog and the protector of women, and just the sort of lover to make every English girl wish to be in the shoes of Maid Marian.

The most important birth of that whole century, in England, is beyond doubt that of the English language. No more fortunate event had ever happened than the eclipse of the various native dialects by the Norman-French of the upper class after the Conquest. This fashion had gone on long after that class had become naturalized, and in driving the native tongue below the genteel surface had a strange and providential effect in that extreme simplicity of the purposes for which a standard English had been required, by the uneducated men who alone had condescended to use it, had produced an answering simplicity in the language itself. As in pidgin-English, most of their inflections were shaved rudely off the words, and the most rustic of all dialects, the Midland, was pressed into general service. Simple auxiliaries were good enough for the practical purposes of a tongue that no longer aspired to be literary. And thus, without anyone suspecting it, was evolved what was to prove an unsurpassed vehicle of literary expression, by reason of the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

practical English common sense of saying what had got to be said with as few frills and complications as possible.

But this emergence of a native language has an importance more than literary. The vulgar tongue was needed to reinforce the Common Law in imparting to English civilization its unique quality. There could be no full spiritual independence so long as thought was being expressed through the medium of a foreign, and Latin, tongue ; or rather tongues—for there was the more or less genuine Latin of the Church, which answered the purpose of a Christian esperanto, as well as the Gallic patois that had taken form as French. The yoke of Rome could be one of speech as well as of law ; freedom in both was necessary if national independence was to be consummated.

But freedom may be dearly bought by a mere persistence in original barbarism. John Bull might have hardened his heart in the pride of totalitarian egotism, and refused to take anything whatever from the foreigner, even for his good. But that has never been John Bull's way. With what an unfriendly critic might describe as true English unscrupulousness, he has appropriated to himself whatever good things Providence has put in his reach, but always with the proviso that they are for him and not he for them. He will use just as much of them, and in just such a way, as happens to suit his insular purposes. The English language is no more a pure-blooded product than the Englishman himself. It has been enriched by shameless pilfering, most of all from Latin sources. The rude, muscular strength of German has been married to the intellectual sensitiveness of the classic heritage, and the excellencies of both parents are compounded in the offspring.

For so portentous a birth, what mind was equal to the office of midwife ? It was the honour of London to have supplied the need through so representative a specimen of her middle class as the vintner's son, Chaucer. For it was not only that Chaucer had genius, but that it was

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

the precise sort of genius needed to put English language, and English culture, on the map of Europe. It neither soared to mystical heights nor plumbed profound depths of knowledge, but it expanded with unequalled comprehensiveness on the human level, so that Chaucer's works are something not far short of a complete English literature. It is as if he had set himself to put the new language through all its paces ; to show what it was capable of doing in every recognized mode, from a romance to a sermon ; and to educate it in all the latest accomplishments and fashions of France and Italy, not that it might copy, but it might start level with them.

Chaucer alone would be sufficient proof that whatever England had lost during these wars of the fourteenth century, she had found her own soul ; and that if she had acquired too good a conceit of herself, she was not without grounds on which to base it. Her very stones cry out her individuality. Just about the time that Chaucer was beginning to learn his trade, there was also beginning a new style of architecture that—whatever else may be said about it—might be claimed as an English patent, in the sense that there was nothing remotely like it anywhere else in Europe. For the branching freedom, the upstarting curvature of the decorative style is now caught up and stiffened in the rectangular framework of the perpendicular, with its unexampled profusion of ornament, its vast surfaces of glowing and flaming glass, and the culminating glory of its fan-traced roofs.

And yet there is perceptible in this very magnificence a certain hardening of spirit, as the Middle Ages draw towards their close. The confident idealism of Gothic Christianity is replaced by a cult of Mammon that rises to a climax in the fifteenth century, which, if not the least prosperous, is surely the least lovable time in English history.

The rhythm of power politics is monotonous in its repetition. Again, after the failure of Edward III's great effort at expansion, and his own death, we find

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

England in the trough of depression ; again an unfortunate king becomes the scapegoat of a disgruntled and disloyal nation, and after two troubled decades is done miserably to death ; but this time the long, fruitless effort in arms, with the added horror of pestilence—the ghastly bubonic plague or Black Death—has undermined the foundations not only of the throne but of the whole order of society.

The surest sign of nearness to breaking point was the exhaustion of the almost limitless patience with things as they are that centuries of manorial routine had engrained in the peasants. In France, where the strain had been greatest, and where the lord of an estate really did tend to be its despot, the result was savage rebellion put down with equal savagery. In England the trouble was not so much that the peasant was badly off, with his holding and livelihood guaranteed by the custom of the manor, as that, in the general disorganization and a depleted labour market, he saw a chance of bettering himself by putting up his services to auction, a thing that conservative Parliaments, genuinely shocked, tried to prevent by futile but irritating legislation. And the peasant was now frequently an old soldier, with weapons to his hand, and an itch for something more exciting than peaceful routine. There are stray, but significant, witnesses to the revolutionary sentiment that was abroad at this time. In certain churches the village artist has depicted Christ as a workman, surrounded by a halo of tools. And there is the mysterious priest, John Ball—if, indeed, he was one man—who went about preaching a doctrine of absolute social equality.

After the final collapse of the French adventure things were obviously working up for a crisis and an almost war-bankrupt administration had only to put on another tax in order to precipitate it. There was a practically spontaneous revolutionary combustion in the Home and Eastern counties ; the fall of London itself ; the Government at the mercy of a mob which penetrated the Tower

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

and hacked off the head of a politically minded Primate. But the Englishman, though a formidable rioter, lacks the intransigence of the successful revolutionary. It all fizzled out with a theatrical gesture, a boy King successfully appealing to the sentiment of a crowd which had just seen its leader cut down before its eyes. Fair play and a square deal was all that the men wanted, and what they dispersed in the happy delusion that they had got—an error, for promises made under duress are easily repudiated. There was work for the hangman in the ensuing months. But the social revolution went on; the system of estate socialism was moribund. A child must grow out of its clothes, however comfortable.

But the war strain had more directly patriotic repercussions. It was not wholly, or even principally, against the lay bosses that there had been murmuring. The spiritual *imperium* of Rome had become more and more discredited. What good Englishman was going to give more than lip homage to a Holy Father who, during the whole period of Edward III's war, was shut up in a French palace at Avignon under the thumb of the national enemy? No wonder that Parliament should have taken steps to deprive the Bishop of Rome of practical authority in the realm of England, though, in the true English conservative spirit, the outward form of Catholicism was religiously honoured. But a new discontent was beginning to stir against the Church, not obscurely connected with the democratic upheaval. What part had the Carpenter's Son in this fabulously rich corporation? In what way were its chiefs entitled to greater wealth than the apostles? There were others, perhaps, who could do with it.

This movement back to an apostolic austerity of life and morals, associated with the great but shadowy figure of John Wycliffe and his Lollard revivalists, was one that the Church was able to drive below the surface, but only by sacrificing her last rags of spiritual prestige. She was now frankly committed to sitting tight on her money bags, and maintaining her authority, in alliance with

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

the secular power, by torturing critics to death. This might answer well enough so long as those with a stake in the existing distribution of wealth saw fit to hang together. But a time might come when the temptation to a share-out might be too much for the lay partner in the alliance. And then what leg would the Church have to stand on? Or what would become of the already frayed bond that bound the island to the Continental civilization?

Three and a half decades of comparative quiescence had allowed the country to gather sufficient head of material strength to start the French dance of death over again, on the now familiar lines. The third phase of expansion followed with remarkable accuracy the course of the first two, only on a lower spiritual plane. It was no longer the rough-hewn patriotism of the first Edward, nor even the commercialism in arms of the third, that was the prime impelling motive of young Henry V in going forth, as the song says,

"to Normany
With grace and might of chivalry."

He had inherited a shaky and usurped title, and there was no better way of securing his own position than by a spectacular military adventure, for which the lucky chance of a France torn by faction and governed by a lunatic offered a golden opportunity. There was the usual spectacular victory (know ye not Agincourt?) with the archers enjoying a battue of dismounted men in armour floundering helplessly through boggy ground, and the King commanding a general massacre of prisoners; then, in due course, a more than usually horrible siege of Rouen, marked by spectacular ruthlessness to non-combatants; and finally Paris itself falling without a blow, thanks to an English alliance with the dominant faction in a French civil war; Henry dying Regent of France, with the reversion of the Crown. It was as a matter of fact nothing more than the old story of English expansion having punched a precarious bulge into French

CONTINENTAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

territory—from the North this time. There was not enough force behind the punch to offer the remotest chance of a knock-out, and years of fighting merely produced a situation like that of the Greek armies in 1921, stretched out exhausted on the bank of a river they had no strength to cross, and ready to crumple up at the moment a recovered nationalism had gathered strength for a blow. Where a shout is all that is needed to start the fall of a tottering structure, it may come, without violence to nature, from the lips of a girl. And that at least helps to explain Joan of Arc.

But the English were tougher stuff than the Greeks, and it took another weary quarter of a century to get them finally reduced to Calais as a last *pied à terre* on French soil. By that time the damage done to both countries by this senseless, profitless, and unchristian butchery, had wrought untold material and spiritual havoc in both of the contending nations. On France, which had been by far the worse sufferer, the effects were more profound and lasting. Her war of liberation had committed her for centuries to the path of military and centralized despotism on the Roman model. The French kings, with a professional army supported by arbitrary taxation, ruled, as Mr. Coulton puts it, "what was, apart from the totalitarian papacy, the most totalitarian state in Europe."¹ These English invasions had been nails driven in the coffin not so much of France, as of European civilization.

England had not been in the grip of such dire necessity, nor forced to such desperate expedients. In spite of everything, she had contrived to carry on a vigorous and increasing trade, and to make steady though gradual progress towards entering the foreign market as the exporter of her own manufactures, instead of merely raw material. Her immunity from invasion gave her an advantage that even her most expensive follies were powerless to cancel.

¹ *Medieval Panorama*, p 513.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

But the pass to which she had been brought by this happily final collapse of her attempt to found an English empire on the Continent was dire indeed. She had not only lost France, but had come about as near as was possible to losing her own soul ; for in real life those who advance their souls in consideration of worldly profit, are seldom fortunate enough to obtain delivery.

The third phase of expansion was followed with what was now monotonous accuracy by its aftermath of exhaustion, revolt, and regicide. Only this time the situation was far worse than before. It did really seem as if the tender plant of English liberty were destined to wither and die like its Continental sisters. Even the Common Law was degenerating into a corrupt farce ; any powerful magnate was able to set it at defiance, or still worse, to enlist it in the cause of his own injustice. Of what use was the jury system, when juries were habitually bribed and intimidated ? And Parliament, the jury of the nation, was as much the tool of aristocratic bosses as any other jury. The strain of prolonged, unsuccessful war at last seemed as if it had got to the point of wrecking the great administrative machine that had continued to function through so many vicissitudes ; as if magnates, now thoroughly out of hand and backed by private armies of their own retainers, were about to set the country on the way that leads from a chaos of petty tyrannies to the refuge of one central despotism.

For Empire is a thing that is Cæsar's, and the country that becomes an empire must sooner or later render itself unto a Cæsar.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

THE TUDOR SECRET

ANYBODY surveying the situation after the final British expulsion from France might have been excused for concluding that the representative principle had had the fullest possible trial in England, and been proved palpably wanting. As Professor Pollard has pointed out, "Parliament, in the Fifteenth Century, seemed to be treading the downward path of continental estates . . . good resolutions were the limit of its capacity, and they were short-lived. No parliament had offered successful resistance to the Crown . . . rebellion and rival claims to the throne were always required to effect a change in government or policy."¹ In short, Parliament had made huge claims, and even established them in theory—but beyond making itself a considerable nuisance, it had quite failed to make its will effective in any vital decision. And now that the nation seemed sliding down into chaos, Parliament was helpless to do anything except say yes to whatever incompetent or usurper the fortune of war might bring to the top.

In every other considerable nation, the representative principle was already moribund. A strong sovereign, with an adequate military force to back him, was everywhere in demand—there was no real national sentiment behind the Estates Assemblies. And for England, what was left but to receive strength and unity, as she had after the Conquest, from the strong hand of her kings? That remedy was applied, not without every appearance of success. Parliament recedes into the background; it acts the part of a discreet courtier, its speech is a loyal affirmative. But—and this is the astonishing and unique

¹ *The Evolution of Parliament*, pp. 132-3.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

thing—it remains in being ; it does not even atrophy ; the privileges that it has blackmailed weak and war-needy monarchs into conceding are kept intact and undiminished, as if in cold storage.

As so often in history, the most momentous things to record are not those that happened, but those that might have happened and did not. Things that not only might but—one can almost imagine oneself saying—must and ought to have happened. For a law and Parliament that had so signally failed to justify their own existence—and after so prolonged a trial—were surely only fit to be scrapped and replaced by something more serviceable to the nation.

That, I repeat, is what one can imagine oneself saying, if one were to be transported into the middle of the fifteenth century without knowledge of the future. But it is a strange and significant thing that there should even in those days have been men who were saying the exact opposite, and who, in the darkest hour, held fast to their faith in constitutional liberty. One of these was no less a personage than the Chief Justice Fortescue who, when he himself had followed into exile the ruined House of Lancaster, was writing the most eloquent panegyric yet composed about the laws of England, and contrasting her happy state with that of despotically governed France, where the Commons had not even the spirit to make good rebels and robbers—an original sort of commendation from a judge. But it is even more significant when we find a similar comparison being made in France itself, by her leading contemporary historian, de Commynes, who concedes to England the palm over all other lands in the ordering of her public weal, and speaks of her Parliamentary government as “a thing most wise and holy”.¹

It is one advantage about a mind so illogical as that of John Bull, that he has never had the faintest scruple about making the best of both worlds, or of basing his

¹ Quoted by G. G. Coulton, *op. cit.*, p. 515.

THE TUDOR SECRET

action, when it has suited his convenience, upon principles that contradict each other. Thus he contrived to allow his Sovereigns a practically free hand as managing directors of his national business, without sacrificing one jot or one tittle of his national liberties ; he even allowed them to dispense with the Common Law when dealing with those powerful interests that had put themselves above it, and yet to preserve that law and foster its growth as the rule of the land, to which Star Chamber justice, or—as we might translate it in modern terms—trial by Cabinet, served only in the capacity of a prop to a growing tree. To put it in another way, a native political genius unexampled except in the republic of old Rome, instead of cutting itself loose from the way of its constitution and law, contrived to by-pass it until it could be made fully practicable.

It was a matter of no man's conscious devising ; there was no dictator or patriot hero, no one of the calibre of Alfred or even Edward Longshanks to take the situation in hand. The protagonists of the drama were—with the pious and pitiful exception of Henry VI—egotists, and more often than not criminal egotists, concentrated on a ruthless struggle for survival. But it is as if England herself had developed a subconsciousness equal to the shaping of her own destinies ; as if John Bull had already begun to acquire that great saving prejudice of his to the effect that such and such things were not done, or not English—and that the way of Rome, and of Cæsarism, was the way in which things had to be so contrived as *not* to happen.

Certainly everything did work out with beautiful precision according to what we might speak of as the English plan. The end of the French War saw the Englishman's patriotism not quenched, but turned in a mood of blind fury against his own rulers. He was not in the least shaken in his belief that he could beat any number of Frenchmen in fair fight—Agincourt had settled that ; if he had been beaten at all it was because he had

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

been fighting witchcraft, or because the politicians at home had been got at by the enemy. There was, about the revolt that punctually broke out in Kent according to precedent, no trace of the high democratic idealism of John Ball's day. It was started by an ex-service man, one Jack Cade, and had scarcely any more definite purpose than that of getting even with these same traitors and incompetents in high places.

This was merely the informal prelude to a much more formidable attack on the same objective. King Henry's Government had lost the confidence of the country, and nothing but the sword could decide what would in our day be settled at the polling booths. Another war veteran, and a popular hero, the Duke of York, who was descended from an older branch of the Royal house, put himself up for the headship of what we should now call a National Government, and from that the transition to crowned headship was inevitable. There were even party colours, the Red and White Roses. Several appeals, and the liquidation of all the original leaders, were necessary to put White into undisputed power, with the backing of all that was most progressive and civilized in the country, including the growing commercial interests centred in London ; and it was becoming more than ever apparent that—as even Henry II had perceived—in any English civil war the side in possession of that enormous military base and obstacle was practically unbeatable.

England, if she had been reduced to deciding constitutional issues by force, had at least hit upon a technique that, in comparison with the blood baths of civil strife on the Continent, was the next best thing to constitutional. The judges went placidly about their usual routine ; the course of trade was hardly more interrupted than it is by a modern election ; the armies, for the most part, adjourned to convenient open spaces for glorified tournaments which were followed by the highly beneficent decapitation *en masse* of the magnates on the losing side, who had as much chance of getting away as so many giant

THE TUDOR SECRET

tortoises. The only exception to this generally sporting conduct was when the Lancastrian Queen, Margaret, roused the old slumbering antagonism of North and South by leading the rough and tough retainers of the Northumbrian lords on a looting expedition up the Great North Road, in the course of which they did enough damage to 'arouse popular feeling to the pitch of a really decisive—and a soldiers'—battle, in the snow at Towton.

When we talk of the English constitutional genius, we are speaking of something mysterious in its workings, but definite in its effects. Time and again, since it first became possible to talk of the English people, has that people not only contrived to have a mind and will of its own, but to get what it wants done, through most illogical means. Even a dynastic squabble like the Wars of the Roses might be the means of implementing that will, for its result was to give the country the strong government it wanted without any permanent sacrifice of its liberties, a feat that no other country came near to accomplishing.

It was not only that sword and axe had effected a salutary letting of blue blood, but that the confiscated estates of traitors—those who had been ill-advised enough to plank for the losing party—had brought a substantial enough windfall to His Majesty for him to carry on, with a fair margin, on a peace time basis, without coming, hat in hand, to his Faithful Commons. That, by all contemporary notions, was just as it should have been. The King living on his own income without bothering his subjects, and Parliament deprived of any lever for blackmailing him, was the political equivalent of "happy ever afterwards".

That was what the average, law-abiding Englishman stood to gain by substituting a strong Yorkist for a weak Lancastrian Government. It was not his fault that within quite a short time the new dynasty should have become impossible in the person of Richard III. The technique of getting rid of inconvenient rulers, with a minimum of disturbance, is one that has never failed John Bull.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

He knew what sort of a Government he wanted and what sort of man he wanted to run it—provided he got him ; he was prepared to turn a Nelson eye upon any little flaw in his pedigree. Henry Tudor's claim might be brazen from the standpoint of the genealogist or the stud-book, but provided the nation was ready to make believe in its genuineness, what did it matter to anyone except those few unfortunate individuals whose theoretically superior claims might render their existence inopportune ?

The House of Tudor did, in fact, provide the country with just the sort of strong, popular monarchy it was looking for, to guide it through this supremely critical period of its history. The two last Henrys and Elizabeth may or may not command our personal sympathies ; what does matter about them is that they were representative, in the profoundest sense, of the nation over which they ruled ; that they had that realization, which is no less essential to kingcraft than journalism, of what their public wanted and what it would stand.

Of these three providentially qualified rulers, the greatest was surely the first. A person so entirely lacking in kingly veneer and what in journalese parlance is called human interest, is never likely to achieve popularity. But judge him fairly by results, and it will be seen that Henry VII did, at a minimum of expense, just what it happened to be necessary for a King of England to do. He tackled problems that his predecessors had wasted blood and treasure unlimited in failing to solve, and solved them one after the other with so little fuss that it took the wisest of Englishmen, Francis Bacon, to perceive the consummate mastery of his kingcraft.

Certainly no one can make him into a patriot hero. It was palpably in his interest to make a success of the business whose headship he had seized ; he sought peace, as his predecessors had sought war, from motives of purest egotism. But the fruits of peace and good management were none the less enjoyed by the country. Commercial prosperity proved attainable in far greater

THE TUDOR SECRET

measure by process of bargain and treaty than by inventing claims to foreign thrones and shedding seas of blood. A technique of exploiting the royal marriage bed—and Henry, as an elderly widower, showed himself agreeably prepared to embrace the charms of a known lunatic or of his own daughter-in-law—was more effective than any war could have been in enabling England to sway the balance of European power and, what is more, in providing for the eventual happy union of the two British nations.

This knife-faced man with the clutching hands and lucid intelligence had no difficulty in identifying his own interest with that of England, or perceiving in what direction that lay. He had no hankering after such despotism as his brother sovereigns were building up ; to pursue that path would have been to take the line of maximum resistance, whereas, in the role of a constitutional king, he could get all the safety and power he wanted with the least possible friction. He had only to keep the peace and keep the law to become a strong King at the head of a prosperous nation. And what more could any king or nation require ?

Thus it came about that under a monarchy to all outward appearance as strong as any in Europe, the liberties of John Bull were preserved substantially intact. They may not have been asserted, because there was no need ; but that they were there, ready for use, was enough for any reasonable Englishman. And if the King, living, like any one of his subjects, on his lawful income, did show a pettifogging ingenuity in extracting the uttermost legal farthing, this procedure was one that John Bull could thoroughly understand ; and perhaps he was not altogether sorry to see the screw applied to some of those overweening magnates who had, up till very recently, been above the law altogether. And His Majesty, to do him justice, was as economical of blood as he was of everything else. It was more satisfactory to fine a man than to liquidate him.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

The fact was—and herein lay the whole Tudor secret—that the King and his people were working in cordial alliance. And when we speak of the people we mean the nation as a whole, the essential John Bull, that undefinable unity of soul and purpose which is the condition of patriotism. It was the King's business to be the living symbol of that patriotism, the most popular man in the nation. There could be no question of tyranny, because there was none of coercion. The King had no force worth speaking of to back his authority; against any rebellion he would have to rely on what amounted to an *ad hoc* volunteer levy. The fact that no successful rebellion was ever staged against a Tudor is thus proof positive that from first to last they had the majority of the country effectively on their side. Otherwise they would have been at the mercy of the first determined mob.

That was just where the typical Continental Sovereign differed from his good brother of England, in that he had no use for sovereignty without force to back it, and that he was prepared to use that force to make his sovereignty as unqualified as possible. Generally speaking his instinct was to regard any sort of constitutional limitation as so much grit in the machinery of ordered government. Representative bodies, capable of opposing his will, were not to be tolerated for a moment longer than necessary. Nor were they.

But it was in a very different spirit that even the proudest Tudor regarded Parliament. Nothing was further from his thoughts than to suppress or emasculate it. On the contrary, it was the greatest asset, the most invaluable ally, that the Sovereign possessed. For holding his authority by popular consent—as he needs must without military or police backing—his chief difficulty consisted in providing that consent with a mouthpiece. It was not nearly so much a question of Parliament keeping him short of money, as of its giving him some chance of raising it. For the bare attempt to collect a tax was as likely as not to precipitate a rebellion,

THE TUDOR SECRET

and the knowledge that Parliament had sanctioned it at least rendered the contingency less probable.

And Parliament, particularly as represented by the Faithful Commons, feeling itself between the devil of the Crown and the deep sea of the constituencies, was hardly less eager than Royalty itself to evade so odious a necessity, by finding convenient pigeons for royalty to pluck. For since Parliament and the Crown had this in common, that they stood for the nation as a whole against disruptive or imperfectly assimilated elements, they were both heartily at one in a patriotic eagerness to make such elements the fiscal scapegoat for the rest of the community. We have just witnessed a striking example of such remunerative patriotism, in the plunder of the Jewish community in Germany.

A strong Crown was a rich Crown, and a popular king was one who kept the tax collector rather than the headsmen out of employment. The horror of anarchy had bitten as deep into the nation's soul as after the experience of Stephen's reign. As late as Elizabethan times we can see this ; never was there so passionate a sermon against civil war as is contained in Shakespeare's unjustly neglected Henry VI Trilogy—so magnificent in its concluding phase—and it is echoed again and again by his fellow poets and playwrights. Modern sentiment is very naturally horrified at the judicial murders of prominent personages, male and female, that provide the high and sinister lights of sixteenth century history. But contemporary opinion took these unpleasant episodes with what Marjorie Fleming might have described as "more than usual calm". The bare suspicion, even the possibility of treason, was enough reason for liquidating any man or woman whatever. The formula at treason trials, "The Lord send you speedy deliverance," was a grim joke.

For the fear of treason was a veritable obsession, not only with royalty, but with the man in the street. It was a thing of which one could not afford to run the slightest

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

risk. For what treason implied on the part of anyone powerful enough to make it effective, was a renewal of all those horrors that had become chronic during the latter half of the fifteenth century, beginning with Jack Cade and ending with Perkin Warbeck. "Never again," was written on the very heart of the country. And—to look at the thing in proportion—there was much less execution on Tower Hill in a century than had been done in course of a few hours at Barnet or Towton.

A few aristocratic heads were a cheap price to pay for a united nation. There was one incomparably greater by which the strength of the Crown might have been—and was—purchased in most European countries, that of military despotism. The civil wars of Rome had ended in a Cæsar, and where the spirit of Rome walked abroad that remedy was still sovereign. Only the Tudors succeeded in imposing their peace, not by destroying but by maintaining and fostering their people's liberties. For this, if we look below the surface, was what actually happened. The Tudors were not, as they are sometimes represented, tyrants, who went about offing people's heads, and whose will was their law. Henry VIII may be dubbed an egomaniac, perhaps something of a monster, according to the point of view, but he has as indefeasable a title to be called a great Parliament man as Pitt or Gladstone. His daughter, Elizabeth, who never quailed before Rome or Spain, could yet humble herself before her High Court of Parliament. Neither of them could have dreamed of compassing anyone's death except by due process of law, unless we are to make an exception of Elizabeth's suggestion—flatly rejected—that the already condemned criminal, Mary of Scotland, should be quietly disposed of by her jailer without the publicity of the scaffold. There were no doubt judicial murders; but the point was, they were legal murders. Even where there was no trial at all, the business was done by Act of Parliament, and the fact that Parliament seldom made the least difficulty about obliging His Majesty in such a

THE TUDOR SECRET

matter, is simply due to the fact that Parliament was as ready to take its lead from a Tudor monarch as it is from a modern Premier.

That great English commandment, "It is not done," was ever before their eyes. That is where the Tudors differ from the Stuarts. However imperious they might be in other ways, they knew by a sort of instinctive tact just how far, and in what directions, it was safe to go. Their power was strictly conditional on their honouring the appropriate taboos. They must, even in wrong-doing, fear the law, honour Parliament, and, to the utmost of their ability, keep the peace. This last requirement was fundamental, because it was as vital to their happiness as it would be to that of Mr. Micawber, to make income exceed expenditure. This, on a peace budget, could, by dint partly of strenuous cheeseparing and partly by any legal and parliamentary means of discovering alternatives to taxation, just—and only just—be done. The fact that Britain was an island alone rendered such a policy practicable.

For however profound a gratitude may be owing to this great dynasty, it must not be forgotten that the circumstances, of which they so brilliantly availed themselves, were unique. In no other country would it have been possible for the King to have dispensed with the services of an army, and thus to have held his subjects' allegiance by no other than the invisible bond of his own popularity. He was a perpetual hostage for his own good behaviour, a servant bound to the strict terms of his unwritten indenture, and liable to be kicked out of doors without notice, as so many had been before him, on any serious failure to give satisfaction. It was his sole hope of salvation, that he should make himself so indispensable to his very uncertain-tempered master, Mr. Bull, that that master would loyally support him through thick and thin, as a good servant ought to be supported.

It is equally to the credit of master and servant that each should have so thoroughly understood the unformulated

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

reality of the situation, and that each should have known, and got, substantially what he wanted out of it. The Sovereign might play at being a Cæsar and his subjects would play up to him, on the tacit understanding that it was all a game ; the reality was better acted on than talked about—until the coming of another dynasty that took the game seriously.

And it was an arrangement that up to a point worked magnificently. Henry VII, whatever else he was, gave about the best service that John Bull had ever received. By the time he had finished the nation had risen, prosperous and confident, out of the lowest trough of depression. The fifteenth century had been one of shattered promise, of cumulative frustration. All the high hopes of the preceding age had ended in disappointment. Abroad, the record was one of utter failure at vast expense ; at home, the constitutional experiment seemed to have broken down and the old, feudal chaos to have come back. There was a corresponding slump of spiritual values ; the Chaucerian dawn had been followed by no noontide glory, and apart from the lovely prose of the *Morte d'Arthur*, the fifteenth century is one whose literary interest is more academic than human. Religion had fallen into an even worse case ; a spiritually minded Churchman, of any prominence, might have been looked for in vain. The Church had, with the aid of the stake and the secular arm, brutally driven below the surface any attempt to reform her house from within ; and that was not difficult, since there was no longer enough scattered enthusiasm for any reformer to gather to an effective head. Look which way you would, you could discover scarcely any relief to the hard and glittering prospect of worldliness.

It is true that even this was not without a certain splendour of its own. There was no such utter collapse in England as there had been in France during the chaos of the Hundred Years' War. It was still a great, a splendid age of building and ornament ; a characteristic rich

THE TUDOR SECRET

man's art, lavishly detailed and finished, with every bit of surface proclaiming its money value. Because whatever else may have been lost, money was being made ; there were merchant princes, like Canynges of Bristol ; there were successful pushers like the Paston family of the famous letters . . . capital was beginning to talk ; there was as strenuous a concentration on the main chance as in modern Chicago.

And yet, with the new century hardly a decade old, it became evident that England was astir with the promise of a new life ; that under the skilful and firm control of her new dynasty she was beginning to find her soul again. Her mood was ceasing to be one of disgruntled cynicism ; she was beginning to recover her pride in herself, and to look Europe in the face with something of her old confidence. The enthusiasm of the later Renaissance, with its boundless hopes for mental enrichment and liberation, was infecting her, and she reacted to it as always after her own fashion. There was no question of a new Paganism, but rather of that peculiarly English thing, a conservative revolution. A new life was to be infused into the dry bones of orthodoxy, and Christian civilization to be reborn, with the spiritual fervour of the old age wedded to the intellectual beauty of the new.

Henry VII was not one of those people who get much thanks for their work. He had, throughout life, been serving his own interests with extreme efficiency, and it so happened that his interests and those of the country had exactly coincided. He had achieved success, without having done anything to attract love, and when he was finally deposited in the sumptuous tomb that was one of his few extravagances, there can have been few who were not glad to exchange the old miser for a glorious young giant who seemed a veritable paragon of all kingly accomplishments, not only an athlete and a scholar of the first rank, but a thoroughly typical Englishman, of an Englishman's dream.

"The world is waking out of a long, deep sleep . . .

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

that king of yours may bring back the golden age, though I shall not live to enjoy it."

The writer is the great Erasmus, the undisputed leader of advanced thought in a Europe fermenting with new ideas. The King, of course, was only the symbol or focus of an English Renaissance that was already well under way when he came to the throne, a movement already associated with such names as those of More, Colet, Linacre, Lyly, and Grocyn. The date was 1519, two years after a certain monk had nailed his theses to the Church door at Wittenberg.

CHAPTER II

THE DECLARATION OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

The time was at hand when England would be faced with a decision of incalculable moment to herself and the rest of mankind. Was she to accomplish her destiny in membership of European civilization, or cut herself finally adrift to evolve a civilization on lines of her own?

It was a question that dated from the landing of Augustine on her shores—we might go farther and say, since that of Cæsar. Only her national genius for compromise could have allowed it to remain so long in suspense. She had hitherto contrived to maintain a sort of associate membership; to be at one and the same time wholly continental in theory, and, in practice, three parts insular. Now events had begun to shape themselves in such a way that it would be no longer possible to continue making this illogical best of both worlds. It must be yes or no; one thing or the other.

But what thing? For it is vital that we should grasp what was actually at stake. It is all too easy to talk of the defection of England from the body of Catholic Christendom, as if this were an act of simple treason, a step perversely retrograde and—viewed in the light of events—wholly deplorable. And no doubt there is much to be said in support of such an indictment. Europe is indeed likely to perish in an anarchy of nationalisms. And the failure of England to march in step with a united Christendom may well have provided the decisive increment tilting the scales in favour of such anarchy.

But what if the sacrifice demanded of England should have been that of her own soul? For it behoves us to

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

look a little more closely into the meaning of that fair phrase, "a united Christendom." The spirit of that unity could hardly by the remotest stretch of imagination be said to have inspired the Sermon on the Mount or to have had its source at Nazareth. As in the days of Claudius and Hadrian, it was still the Pontifex Maximus who asserted his authority over the province of Britain; it was the Roman spirit and system that permeated the cult of Christ crucified; it was into the peace of Roman civilization that England, if she put off her insular individuality, would be reborn.

So far she had contrived to play her geographical role of taking just as much from the Continent as suited her, and no more. She had taken eagerly all that Rome had had to give. It is true that it was not the way of Rome to give something for nothing. The price she exacted for her benefits was that of full submission; the very essence of her system was the unconditional dependence of all the parts upon the central, and centralized, unity. Not that John Bull made any bones about accepting these conditions. He allowed himself to be duly received into the Catholic fold, and a good Catholic he remained, for nine long centuries—as far, that is, as formal profession could make him so. But his lip service did not prevent him from continuing to build up his native civilization in practical independence, and on principles fundamentally incompatible with those to which he formally subscribed. As it was his habit to let sleeping principles lie, he could do this with a conveniently clear conscience.

During the fourteenth century, the bonds that held England to the Roman See had been frayed to threads. The long residence of the Papal court at Avignon had converted Christ's Vicar into not much more than a vassal of an enemy Power, and his authority over England was flouted in the most cavalier spirit. The movement of incipient Puritanism, led by John Wycliffe, had at one time gathered strength enough to threaten a complete break-away from the Roman system. There had been

ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

an apparent swing back to orthodoxy during the fifteenth century, but this had been largely because a weak dynasty had entered into alliance with the great vested interest of the Church, and because in an age of rampant materialism no one had an interest in disturbing the existing framework of society.

A religious settlement based on nothing more spiritual than the power of wealth and the habit of outward conformity is not likely to stabilize itself in an age of revolutionary change. Modern history dates, by general consent, from the year 1492, in which Columbus made a voyage that had the practical effect of turning the world from flat to round, and thus upsetting the main assumption on which Rome had based her claim to universal empire. At the same time the inventions of gunpowder and printing were beginning to act with cumulative effect upon the old order of civilization. Everywhere there was boundless hope, the feeling that a new golden age was about to dawn, and that Man, armed with new powers and new knowledge, was capable of accomplishing his own salvation.

Upon no country had the opening of new horizons a profounder effect than upon England. It had altered her whole situation. She was no longer the island upon the edge of the world ; for the world had ceased to have an edge, and on the surface of a globe any point is equally central.

There was less reason than ever that England should merge her destinies in what was essentially a Mediterranean order of civilization. Never, even when she visualized herself as lying on its very circumference, a pre-destined outsider among nations, had she submitted to be centralized in more than name. She had developed her own soul in virtual independence of Europe. And now that that soul had fairly come of age, its independence had been vindicated. All roads no longer led to Rome. The sea ways radiated from England.

Things might have been different if she had grown up

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

into the acceptance of Roman discipline and the Roman outlook. Then her mind might have been formed beyond any possibility of change, even as Rome's servants, the Jesuits, professed to be able to form the minds of their pupils in infancy. But in the palmiest days of the old empire, England had never been quite as other provinces—she was, at best, only half digested into the system. And the spiritual Empire of the Pontiffs had never given her more than a veneer of Roman civilization. She remained formally Catholic more from inertia than conviction—so long as forms did not bother her, it was not in her nature to bother about them—but once let the connection with Rome bear the strain of practical inconvenience, and it would be safe to predict its sundering.

The first major question to come up for decision at the dawn of the modern age was whether, and to what extent, this framework of Catholic, or Roman, civilization could be adapted to the new conditions. Inertia was no longer to be relied on in an age of new orientations and feverish intellectual activity. That was the significance of the movement of which Erasmus was the leading spirit, which, in fact, aimed at bringing the Church up to date, and reinforcing the Faith with the intellectual beauty and power of the Renaissance.

In England, this impulse operated with a strength that caused even so sceptical a mind as that of Erasmus to conceive visions of a new golden age. Never had her prospect seemed fairer. She was strong and prosperous; the last embers of civil war had been stamped out, and her brilliant young King, himself in the forefront of the new intelligentsia, as well as a militant champion of the old orthodoxy, seemed superbly qualified to launch her in just such a path of conservative progress as best suited her national disposition.

If he had a fault, it was that he was inclined to be a little too brilliant. This no doubt was just what the country wanted after the prosaic experience of the last

ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

reign. It is not surprising that the young fellow, in the first blush of his superb manhood, should have been tardy in grasping the Tudor secret of successful kingcraft, namely that of living peacefully within a normal income. He had a fine hoard bequeathed him by his father to play about with, and a diplomatist of consummate ability, in Thomas Wolsey, to pull the strings of a militant foreign policy. In one year, the fourth after his accession, King Henry had restored his country's prestige by a spectacular but futile addition to the roll of her victories in France, while his Northern levies did more solid work in annihilating, for a generation, the military menace of Scotland. With this encouragement he had continued to empty his pockets in a game of unprofitable bluff, with interludes of expensive pageantry, until in due course, being cleaned out by harder bitten sharpers than himself, he was fain to put in an application to Parliament for fresh supplies. The result of that experiment was enough to convince him that Parliament, though a good servant to a solvent King, was a most curmudgeonly paymaster to a needy one. And a subsequent attempt to screw funds out of the tax-payer without applying to Parliament all but had the effect of precipitating a revolution. That dance would no further go ; the second Tudor had at last acquired the family wisdom, and there would be no more dunning of Parliament, or the tax-payer, for such superfluous luxuries as European prestige.

But all this time that the scarlet magnificence of Wolsey had been dominating the scene, the last sands of opportunity had been slipping through the glass. That is the profound and tragic significance of all this colourful marking time ; as so often before, the event that really mattered was one that ought to have materialized, and never did. The visionaries of a united Europe, spiritually reconstructed, and purged of that corruption and stupidity which the most loyal sons of the Church were the first to deplore, had signally failed to make the least impression

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

on the enormous deadweight of inertia that was blocking the way to reform. Erasmus could set all educated Europe laughing at the triumph of Folly in every department of Catholic civilization, with the sole practical result of weakening the prestige of the existing system without doing anything to strengthen it by reform.

With all their merits—perhaps partly because of their merits—such scholars and critics as Erasmus, and his fellow would-be protagonists of a Catholic reformation, were not of the sort to inspire mass enthusiasm on a revolutionary scale. They were rich in light, but they could not convert it into power. There was a certain almost donnish fastidiousness about them that made them shrink from exposing their intellectual constructions to the rough and tumble of practical politics. Even More, who had a far deeper insight than Erasmus, and was centuries ahead of his time in his vision of social reform, seemed positively anxious to dissociate his speculations from any idea of their practical use. Perhaps the most revealing touch of his masterpiece, the *Utopia*, is the name of the imaginary narrator, Raphael Hythlodæus—or Nonsense. If he were to have adopted the language of Mr. H. G. Wells about such early romances as the *Time Machine*, he would have described the *Utopia* as fetish stuff up to date.

The one thing that could not happen was for the situation to stabilize itself. The spiritual empire of Rome had either got to reform itself or be reformed with a vengeance in spite of itself. If light would not work the miracle, power would have to be applied—power of such explosive concentration as not only to blast the inertia, but to threaten the whole fabric with disruption. A bull-necked peasant monk, of confined light but Titanic energy, was the man qualified to succeed where those urbane humanists had failed. But success like Luther's would be worse to *their* way of thinking than any conceivable failure.

No more inappropriate word was ever coined than Reformation, as applied to the great Protestant revolt

ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

from Rome. That was just what it was not, either in effect or intention. When Martin Luther, in his heroic way, responded to the Pope's decree of excommunication by publicly burning it, he was proclaiming, in the face of all Europe, that the time for reformation was past. It was as much a Declaration of Independence from the Roman as that of the American colonies was to be from the British Empire. The seamless robe of Christendom was, of set purpose, to be rent in twain, and that at a time when a victorious Islam was thundering at the gates of Europe and threatening the safety of Rome itself.

In a sense, it might be described as a resumption of independence, the breaking away from Rome of that Barbarian North that she had never been able to include within the frontiers of her original empire. Up to these frontiers, even in Germany, she was able, once she had recovered from the first shock, and launched her counter-offensive, to reclaim her dominion. Luther stands in true line of succession from Arminius, the original champion of German liberty from the Roman yoke, and the parallel only becomes closer when we remember that Arminius was very soon involved in war with other chiefs protestant against Roman dominion.

And yet, striking as this analogy may seem between ancient and modern, there is one respect in which it fails to hold good. The old Germany might assert her formal independence of Rome, and Rome, if she agreed with her in nothing else, might sorrowfully admit that she had, in part, made it good. But there are bonds of more subtle textures than those, even, of organized Christianity. During the long centuries of Rome's spiritual dominion she had set her stamp on the German soul in a way that no formal revolt could efface. The old spirit of untamable freedom, that more than anything else had distinguished the original Germans, had suffered mortal injury. The habit of obedience was implicit in the law of Rome, and that law had already, by the time of the Reformation, gone most of the way towards driving the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

old traditional or customary German law out of the courts. That process was carried to completion during the sixteenth century. Germany was, after all, still under at least the nominal sway of a temporal Cæsar, and this, if it had no other practical effect, did at least tend to standardize the law of the Central Imperial Court throughout her cities and princedoms. What had once been free Germany had only asserted her independence of the Pontifex Maximus in order to divide herself up among a horde of petty Cæsars who, in the true Roman manner, were autocrats in things spiritual no less than temporal—a consummation towards which no one worked more heartily than Luther himself. That principle once established, it might well only be a matter of time before all little Cæsarisms coalesced into one ideally perfect tyranny. It might be a long journey through time, from the burning of the Pope's Bull to that of the Reichstag—but the road, being Roman, deviated neither to right nor left.

So much for the Reformation in Germany. That word is used equally to cover the secession of England from a united Christendom. But conditions in England were fundamentally different, and events moved towards a widely different goal. Protestant Germany had, roughly speaking, never been included in the original Roman Empire; England had had that experience for centuries, but Roman civilization had failed to permeate her soul to the same extent as in the Continental provinces. During the Middle Ages, doubtless owing to her belt of sea, she had been in a better position to preserve her spiritual independence than unconquered Germany. And, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, she had definitely cut herself off from that Roman way to which her Teutonic cousin was committed. She had preserved, and was developing, law that was not Roman but English—and that was decisive of her independence. So long as John Doe and Richard Roe stood fast upon their irrational liberties, so long would there be no scope

ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

in England for the cult of the State Almighty and the Divine Cæsar. Hold fast to the law, and the spirit will take care of itself.

It was upon a ground of abstract principle that Luther had taken his stand. The controversy of faith against works went to the very roots of philosophy. But the English mind reacts sluggishly to abstractions. It takes a concrete grievance to move John Bull to rise and mutiny. And there happened to be a great deal of John Bull embodied within the billowing contours of Henry VIII.

It was not that the question of principle was any less urgent in England than in Germany itself. But in England the mode of its expression was different ; it was not formulated consciously, but boiled up gradually beneath the surface until it boiled over in a personal quarrel. For a long time the Roman connection had been an irritant of what was now an uncompromising patriotism in the most dynamic sections of the community, which comprised the middle class interests of the towns, and particularly London. There was a latent but gradually increasing tension between the laity and the ecclesiastical authorities ; the Church was getting itself viewed more and more in the light of an enormously rich corporation, parasitic upon the life of the nation. Its money-making activities were more in evidence than any spiritual functions it performed, and were brought into the lime-light by one or two unsavoury scandals that doubtless were worked up for all they were worth.

But it would be a mistake to talk as if there were any great or crying grievance. The Church was outwardly stronger than ever. The greatest statesmen in the realm, men like the Cardinal Prime Ministers, Morton and Wolsey, were drawn from her ranks. If one could arrange for a few weeks' trip to the past, I do not think one could do better than select a tour of England, conducted if possible by the father of antiquaries, Leland, on the very eve of the Reformation. One would be overwhelmed

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

by the sheer beauty and magnificence of the churches and monasteries that everywhere dominated the scene, an opulence not stagnant but continually increasing. Some of the newest buildings would have been the richest, and we who see their mere skeletons can hardly imagine how they have glowed with colour and overflowed with ornament.

The calm was almost unruffled, but it was electric, like that which heralds the bursting monsoon. And already, far away to the South, could be heard the first mutterings of the thunder.

The modern age had brought forces into play whose subtle potency was fatal to that habit of mind by which a *status quo* is maintained. The invention of printing was trenching more and more on what had been the ecclesiastical monopoly of propaganda. For a long time, in England, there had been an urge towards a direct commerce of Man with his Maker, cutting out the consecrated middleman—and incidentally, his profits. The writings of the great English mystics of the fourteenth century enjoyed a popularity long after the spiritual dearth of the fifteenth had extinguished the breed. It had been a main object of Wycliffe's anti-clerical offensive to put God's word, in plain English, into the hands of the people, that they might judge for themselves between Him and His official representatives. But when every word had to be not only translated but copied out by hand, it was impossible to turn out Bibles in any sufficient quantities to be effective. Now, however, the machinery of mass production, brought into existence for the first time, was applied to the written word.

It was in 1522 that Luther had armed the German people with a translation of the New Testament into his own rough-hewn vernacular. This was followed, within two or three years, by an even greater masterpiece, an event of decisive importance alike in history and literature, in Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament and Pentateuch. The ecclesiastical authorities were

ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

alive to this new menace ; they made frantic efforts to stop copies getting into the country, even to the delightfully naive extent of buying up an edition to burn it—as if that were the way to kill a book. It was symptomatic of the Church's attitude that her one resource was in repression. *De heretico comburendo* had become *De bibliis comburendis*.

The sands were very nearly out. Neither in England nor abroad had the Church proved capable of providing a positive remedy, and effecting her reformation from within. That was the real tragedy of Wolsey, a patriot statesman who was at the same time, and equally, a good European, the visionary of a united Christendom with England's as the dominating influence. It was no unworthy ambition that made him aspire to the Papacy itself. And though that never materialized, he undoubtedly aspired to use his power as Cardinal Legate in order to carry through a reform of the Church in his own country. He had even made a start by dissolving one or two of the smaller and more scandalous monasteries, to provide funds for his magnificent Foundation of Cardinal—or Christ Church—College.

But he must needs squander the available resources in an ambitious foreign policy that in the long run achieved less than nothing. This fatal dissipation of energy prevented him from anything more drastic than tinkering at the surface of reform. The impulse communicated by Erasmus and his group of Oxford humanists died gradually away, without having produced the least effect on the reigning inertia. And meanwhile the discontent beneath the surface had gathered such force that it was only a question of what would precipitate the crash.

That question was answered after so strange a fashion that to this day the impression has persisted that England went Protestant as the result of one man's personal caprice in a matter of sex. To all outward appearance, what distinguished the Reformation in England from its

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

counterpart abroad was the absence of any overmastering excitement about the religious issues at stake. There arose nothing remotely corresponding to an English Luther, or Zwingli, or Calvin, no one who could even have been called a second Wycliffe. The propagandists of the new doctrine had certainly not, during Henry VIII's reign, produced anything like a general conversion, or even the particular conversion of Henry himself.

All the more startling is the way in which the whole ancient and hitherto inviolate structure of the Catholic Church in England yielded, almost at a touch, to royal pressure. Henry VIII acted as if it were his object to eclipse all records of sacrilege and to act what any previous generation would have taken to be the part of an Antichrist, a second Nero. Fantastic frightfulness of shrines looted, of their miracle-working inmates cast out on to dungheaps, of Christian devotees martyred for refusing to apostatize from the immemorial faith of all Englishmen, horror on horror's head ; and the country, except for one easily suppressed revolt in its least civilized parts, lifting not a finger to stop it ; while Parliament, the jury of the nation, co-operated with its Sovereign.

A wonderful and a horrible thing it would have seemed, even if it had been the result of fanatical zeal. But there was nothing of the sort, nothing remotely resembling the spirit that was to inspire the Great Rebellion of a century later. Even after the last links with Rome had been severed and the last monasteries dissolved, King and country seemed equally concerned to affirm the soundness of their Catholicism and their intolerance of heresy. The minister who conceived and carried through the great change, Thomas Cromwell, was an adventurer of consummate ability, who though he honoured the King, feared neither God nor devil. But Cromwell's clear-cut ruthlessness was more of an Italian than an English product—he had not studied Machiavelli for nothing—and Cromwell was as hated as King Henry was popular in the country. In fact Henry's personality so dominates the course of

ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

events as to mask their tragic significance and to explain their reduction, in the eyes of the vulgar, to the lowest level of Hollywood melodrama.

What we have to grasp about this matter of Henry's personality is that Henry the King had come to stand, in the eyes of his subjects, for the ideally representative Englishman. The figure of John Bull had become incarnate in him long before the name had been thought of.

Henry, as I surmise, owed little to the Welsh strain in him. As is so often the case, he appears to have favoured almost exclusively one parental stock. A glance at his portrait reveals the unmistakable flat, expansive physiognomy of his mother Elizabeth and his grandfather Edward of York, who, with all his faults—and they were legion—owed not a little of his success to his being one of those free-spoken free-living monarchs whom Englishmen love. No matter what scandals he caused or what taboos he affronted, Bluff Hal, Harry with the Crown, would always be the most popular man in his dominions, the personality in which the average Englishman acclaimed the magnification of his own. To do him wrong would be a direct challenge to patriotism.

Looked at in this light, it will be seen that whatever may be the religious pros and cons of the Reformation, it stands forth as about the most thoroughgoing English event in English history. I have spoken of it as unpredictable, and so, in the ordinary sense, it was. But if we can imagine some contemporary observer of super-human penetration, I am not sure that he might not have made a very fair guess, in advance, of the way that it would have come about. Not on any great issue of abstract or philosophic principle, but because one litigious and representative John Bull had been done out of his rights by a foreigner, and would see himself and everyone else damned before he put up with it.

Remember that in the eyes of the nation, Henry had come to stand as the crowned symbol of patriotism. It

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

was not only that he was just the sort of monarch to focus upon himself the sentimental affection of his subjects but that, sentiment apart, they felt him to be indispensable. There were still those alive who could remember the days when the magnates had set both King and law at defiance, and that memory had burnt into the soul of the nation. A strong monarchy was the sole guarantee for the reign of law ; King Harry was the keystone of the constitutional arch. At all costs he must be kept in place.

Moreover, he was the last person anyone would have thought of as even a heretic. No King of England had ever stood more conspicuously forth as the champion of Catholic Christendom. Even in those late days he had the right to be called a crusader, for he had borne arms against the Moors. At the first sign of mutiny in the Church's own ranks, he had flown to her assistance with his pen ; the result of a slanging match with Luther had been to earn him the proud title Defender of the Faith. And that was the light in which the Pope and everybody else regarded him—the pillar of conservative orthodoxy, and all the more typically English for that very reason.

But it is never safe to presume too far upon the Englishman's conservative bias. His loyalty to things as they are is not unconditional. Once let him suspect that he is being made the victim of deliberate sharp practice, and there is no saying to what lengths of retaliation he may not be prepared to go. To such suspicion Henry's own experience had made him more than normally prone. At the outset of his royal career his chivalrous ardour had been taken advantage of, and he had been fooled to the top of his bent, by the hard-bitten swindlers against whom he had been pitted in the game of international politics. It might be dangerous to repeat the experiment upon him. For not even a woman scorned is capable of greater fury than that of an Englishman who feels that he is being done out of his rights. Nor is that

ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

fury likely to be diminished by the fact that he himself is straining the letter of the law most oppressively in his own favour.

That was just what happened in the famous divorce suit that Henry brought against his first wife, Katherine, the Castilian princess. It was a matter of acute urgency that he should provide himself with a legitimate male heir ; failure to do so would have involved a disputed succession, and the return of those very troubles from which it had been the special mission of the House of Tudor to save the country. The decision in such matters rested with the spiritual head of Christendom ; and the spiritual head of Christendom was the temporal head of a petty Italian state, with his own axe to grind and not the faintest intention of deciding the case on its merits.

Pope Clement would have made no difficulties about accommodating the petitioner had he not lain in mortal terror of the lady's nephew the Emperor, whose victorious armies had already sacked Rome. It was a very different fear from that of God which swayed his decisions. As a moralist, he stood on a lower—if that were possible—than his judicial level. He would have been more than willing to allow Henry to find a way out of both of their difficulties by such Christian alternatives to divorce as adultery, incest (that of his legitimate daughter with his illegitimate son), or bigamy. But as for divorce, those whom Mother Church had joined together and Emperor Charles insisted on keeping together—let not Christ's Vicar put asunder !

Pope Clement was no monster of iniquity ; he was merely a fair average specimen of the Italian prince in the age of Machiavelli ; and Henry, as a man of that world, might reasonably have been expected to shrug his shoulders and make the best of it. But Henry happened to be, for better or worse, a very representative Englishman. He was, unlike the Pope, thoroughly in earnest about his religion, and troubled with the prickings of a sensitive—if not wholly disingenuous—conscience. Above all,

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

he had an invincible sense of his own just rights. If he, the King, were constrained to plead, as a suitor, before another's judgment seat, it should go hard but he would obtain for himself what the least of his own subjects could claim *from* him—"to none will we deny or delay right or justice." And that was exactly what Pope Clement was minded to do in this matter of the divorce. He would go on delaying justice by every transparent and infuriating shift, with a view to denying it altogether unless, by some lucky turn of events, the Emperor ceased to be top dog in Italy.

This thing was not done in a corner. No one in his senses could fail to see what game it was that was being played at England's expense. In the sacred names of morality and justice she was reduced to the status of a vassal power. The great ruler of Spain, Germany, the Indies, and the Netherlands gave his orders to the Pope, who transmitted them to King Henry, and England was in consequence denied the freedom to settle her own policy in the vital matter of the succession. It was not as if public opinion had prejudged the case in Henry's favour. On the contrary, there was every disposition to sympathize with Queen Katherine, who had deserved well of the country and whom everybody preferred to the designing upstart who had supplanted her in the King's affections. He had need of all his tact in handling Parliament to prevent a motion being actually put to the House requesting him to take back his wife! In the known state of popular feeling, it would almost certainly have been carried.

But these pros and cons had ceased to be relevant. The original issue of Henry *v.* Catherine was swallowed up in that of England *v.* Rome. And in that the sense of Parliament, and of the greater part of the country, was overwhelmingly behind Henry—all the more so because he continued to stand before the country, and in his own sincere estimation, as the good and faithful Catholic he always had been. It was the Pope, and

ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

not he, who had betrayed the Church. Let the Pope see to it !

Let it always be remembered that he was English and, as such, blessed with a mental digestion too healthy to be turned by a mere logical contradiction. The Pope had defrauded him of his rights ; the Pope was playing a game of cat and mouse, exposing him to ridicule in the eyes of all Europe. He was to be denied his rights, was he ? defrauded of his liberties as an Englishman and a Sovereign ? Very well, then ; he would go ahead and take them—whatever the consequences to himself and Christendom. It was not he that was to blame—the Pope had only to give way and do the right thing to close the whole incident. Otherwise. . . .

But poor Clement, with the best will in the world, dared not give way. The wrath of a distant King was not to be weighed against that of a very present Emperor. His Holiness stood firm ; he accepted the challenge. He could do no otherwise, God help him !

Nor for that matter could Henry. Short of abject surrender, which to one of his temperament was unthinkable, he was bound, now, to carry the quarrel through to the bitter end. But to what end ? The seceding German princes had launched themselves boldly on the full tide of Lutheranism. Such logical intransigence might be well enough for Germans, but Henry, who was a plain Englishman with a conscience as well as a grievance, was not to be stampeded into heresy. And in that he perfectly reflected the sentiments of the average Englishman, who believed thoroughly in the right of England to manage her own affairs in her own way, and yet did not want to have any truck with heresy. The two aims were, of course, inconsistent, because independence implied heresy, but it were to consider too curiously to consider so.

The compromise arrived at was an extraordinary one. It was to keep Catholicism intact but with the King functioning in place of the Pope as Supreme Head of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

a local universal Church of England. Not for the last time, John Bull had triumphantly accomplished the feat of eating his cake and having it. But in so doing he had, without any compromise at all, turned his back upon the ideal of a Europe united in one Christian civilization.

CHAPTER III

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

Other nations achieved Protestantism ; England may almost be said to have blundered into it. Neither her King, nor any of his subjects capable of moulding public opinion, had had the remotest intention of precipitating a religious revolution. The motive inspiring the break-away from Rome was one of pure and simple patriotism in the crudest sense. John Bull, or Henry Tudor—whichever way you like to put it—was going to be master in his own house, and no foreigner, even if he wore the Triple Crown and had the keys of Heaven, was going to dictate to him. It is to the last degree improbable that either Henry, or his Parliament, ever dreamed of the separation being permanent. On the contrary, they quite evidently imagined that a few vigorous measures, and in particular the docking of funds, would bring Clement to his senses. It was only when that unhappy Pontiff was terrorized into an attitude of no surrender, that one thing led on to another until England found herself committed to an open war of independence from Rome.

Even so, it was an independence essentially political. Henry was thoroughly representative of national feeling in wanting to preserve the religious *status quo*, even if it had to be under his own auspices. He was as much the defender of the faith as ever* ; more so, since he had become its Supreme Head. But the representative Englishman seldom envisages the logical consequences of his actions. His unformulated faith is that of Oliver Cromwell, that a man never rises so high as when he does not know where he is going. To be Catholic without the Pope is as much as to say to be local-universal. No

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

matter ; let us, like mathematicians, imagine such a thing possible and see how it works out in practice.

It is no wonder that under these circumstances the history of England for the thirty years or so from the assembly, in 1529, of Henry's "Reformation" Parliament, records a series of violent shocks, of abrupt changes of direction, like a car that has got into a skid and shoots from side to side of the road at the imminent peril of destruction, until she recovers herself on a side turning at right angles to her original course.

Strong Henry could no more control events than weak Clement. However sternly he might set his face against heresy, he was bound to play into its hands. He was playing a game of desperate bluff. Once let the two great Catholic potentates of Europe, the Most Christian and the Most Catholic, sink their differences and rally to the support of their common faith, and England would be crushed like an eggshell. Like it or not, Henry must strengthen his hands against Rome by any and every means.

Thus he willed a policy and, willy nilly, worked its opposite. With his unerring Tudor sense of the trend of public opinion, he put himself at the head of a conservative reaction ; he made a scapegoat of the hated Cromwell ; he reaffirmed the salient points of Catholic doctrine with an uncompromising firmness fit for an inquisitor. The country wanted nothing better. But the mischief was done. The Papal strongholds, the monasteries, had been given up to plunder all over the country ; a mixed ancient and modern nobility had gorged themselves with the loot, and their one fear was lest a genuine Catholic restoration should compel them to disgorge. Thus was created an overmastering vested interest in heresy ; magnates whose fortunes were founded on confiscation had an obvious motive for going Bolshevik in doctrine.

Again, orthodoxy had been fatally undermined by losing that monopoly of propaganda that had been its

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

sine qua non. Henry might make the preaching of heresy a burning matter, but he himself accomplished more than the greatest conceivable company of Protestant preachers when he set the printing press to work, to provide every parish in the country with an English Bible. Every Tom, Dick, and Harry could now quarry in that enormous mine of fact and legend, of poetry and folklore, and work up his takings into a religion. He had had his grievances against the Church ; now he could get his own back by arraigning the Church herself, and all that she stood for, before the tribunal of his own conscience, with God's word for law ; and it was a Church whose prestige had been wrecked, by the perfect impunity with which its agelong terrors and sanctities had been defied. By his gift of the Bible, the King had released a spirit that he had no power to control.

What was most decisive of all, he had linked the cause of Protestation to that of patriotism. This was inevitable, for it was in the very nature of the Roman Catholic faith to transcend the bounds of nationality. It stands to something higher than reason that he who has sworn allegiance to a supernational Power cannot, without manifest treason, devote himself heart and soul to the service of his country, and nothing but his country.

"In what country soever we walk in this world," says Sir Thomas More, "we are but as pilgrims and wayfarers. And if I should take any country for my own, it must be the country to which I come and not the country from which I come."

Noble and lovely words, but not what anyone could describe as those of a 100 per cent patriotism. All the better for that, it may be said, but the fact remains that Britain had, for better or for worse, cut herself free from any wider allegiance, and pinned her faith to the principle of Sinn Fein, or Ourselves Alone. Patriotism still expressed itself in its crudest form of mass egotism, and was entirely unconscious of what were coming to be its secret springs. And it was felt about Rome that her

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

overlordship was cramping the nation's style and draining its resources to no purpose whatever. Even so great an Englishman as Wolsey found his liberty of statesmanlike action disastrously limited by the fact that even he, as a Prince of the Church, had to draw the line somewhere when it was a question of defying her. His far higher principled successor, More, was, with all his genius, incapable of proving more than a transient embarrassed phantom at the head of affairs. Neither of these men, not even Wolsey, would have dreamed of going all out for King and country in the way that the virtual atheist, Cromwell, did not turn a hair at doing.

And if the Henry-Cromwell combination was prepared to go all lengths for the country, there were diehards of the old faith who were prepared to go to an equal extremity against it ; and these no common traitors, but its very pick of heart and brain. The worst horrors perpetrated by Cromwell were nothing in comparison with those which men like the two Cardinals, the martyred Fisher and the exiled Pole, were prepared to let loose on their countrymen, when they lent themselves to the project of restoring the spiritual empire by the help of Spanish arms. Acknowledgment of the King's supremacy had become the bitter, but fair, test of an undivided patriotism. And if, for the individual, it was death to fail, it was a matter of life and death to the community that the King's authority, once defiantly asserted in the face of all Europe, should brook no challenge from his subjects.

The country itself was swept, like a rudderless boat, along the stream of events. The endeavour to repudiate Rome and the Reformation simultaneously—though that was undoubtedly what public opinion backed the King in demanding—broke down hopelessly, and no sooner had Henry's huge coffin lumbered to Windsor on its nine-storied hearse, than the magnates who ran the government in the name of the child King found it in their interests to open the floodgates of Protestantism.

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

A reign of aristocratic terror, in which the charities and social services of which the Church had been trustee were systematically looted, and the poor exploited with a thoroughness beside which the violence of Stephen's barons seems amateurish, made the country ripe for a Catholic restoration.

But it was too late ; the genuine Reformers had made such use of their opportunity that Protestantism was no more to be expunged by Bloody Mary than Christianity had been by Julian the Apostate. It had struck deepest roots of all in London, and before the machine age it would have been hardly too much to say, "He who has London on his side to-day can be sure of England to-morrow."

More than ever was the Protestant cause identical with that of the nation. For the English Bible had now been reinforced by another classic of the vulgar tongue in the shape of the Prayer Book. Experience of those lovely rhythms made it hard to go back to the hocus pocus of a dead, though universal, language. The two books were in themselves declarations of patriotic independence.

It only needed for the new regime to advertise its divided allegiance in some signal way, in order to make the Catholic a lost cause in England. This it was quick to do. The Queen's marriage to King Philip of Spain reduced proud England to a status of ostensible dependency on an alien, and rival, Power. The humiliation was rubbed in by a display of calculated frightfulness, on the authentic Spanish model, in the propagation of orthodoxy by the stake. This, whatever its moral aspect, was, from the practical standpoint, suicidal lunacy. The none too popular leaders of the heretic faction found themselves elevated to a platform of flaming publicity. Thanks largely to the propagandist genius, in the next reign, of John Foxe, whose *Book of Martyrs* was only less influential than the Bible and Prayer Book, they—not even excepting the shuffling and time-serving Archbishop Cranmer—passed into national legend as the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Protestant Martyrs. The fires of Smithfield had burnt themselves deep into the popular imagination ; never again, so long as England remained unconquered, could there be any question of the Bishop of Rome resuming the least shadow of authority in the Church or State of England.

Then, when the Catholic Queen was actually dying, the final and shattering blow was dealt to the prestige of the Roman connection by the loss of Calais, in a war into which England had been dragged in the wake of her Spanish partner in the axis. No doubt in the long run it was bound to have happened, and the sooner the better ; but for two centuries now Calais had been the apple of England's eye :

" Iron and lead like cork shall swim,
Before the Frenchmen Calais win ! "

and now—thanks to Philip and popery—they had quietly walked into it. It was symbolic. England had lost her footing on the Continent ; she would no longer accept membership in any civilization but her own. Mary, with Calais branded on her broken heart, closed her eyes only just in time.

If it had been possible, even then, to take a doctrinal plebiscite of the whole country, it is on the cards that a Catholic majority might still have been obtained ; but such static and formal reckonings are merely misleading. The dynamic forces of the nation, those that determine the trend of public opinion, were overwhelmingly national, and national had now come to imply Protestant, in at least the negative sense of complete independence of Rome. John Bull would no doubt have preferred to let sleeping dogmas lie ; he liked to keep as much as he could of his old religious habits and ceremonial ; but on one thing he had finally made up his mind—any Church to which he belonged was going to be as English as his Common Law and parliamentary government. It was to be the spiritual body of his civilization—the Church of England. At the very beginning of Henry VIII's

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

troubles, the clergy had consented to acknowledge his supremacy "so far as the law of Christ allows". The Elizabethan settlement tacitly reversed that decision. The Faith of Christ was to hold good so far as the law and spirit of England allowed. How this would work out in practice, only time would reveal. At the moment, the important thing was to patch up some working compromise without too much regard to dogmatic consistency.

Stated in cold blood, this may seem merely cynical. But consider what the situation actually was. It is doubtful whether in the whole of her history the prospects of the country have seemed so desperate as in the dawn of what we are accustomed to think of as the glorious Elizabethan age. The country was bankrupt, discredited, divided against itself, almost defenceless ; and now the ship of state, with an inexperienced young woman at the helm, had to weather such a storm as great Harry himself had never known. For Catholic civilization had rallied all its forces, spiritual and temporal, and was about to launch its great counter-offensive against the Reformation. The long delayed reconstruction had at last been accomplished of a very different sort from that envisaged by Erasmus and his fellow scholars ; its spirit essentially military. Rome had recovered her legions ; not only of trained professionals capable of meeting ten to one odds in the open field, but of civilian devotees, conditioned by a sterner than any parade ground discipline to do, and suffer, everything.

Overshadowing all was the colossal power of Spain, a worldwide empire on a scale hitherto undreamed of. Spain had taken charge of the Counter-Reformation, and infused it with the crusading zeal that she herself had developed through centuries of struggle with the Moor, a zeal that spared nothing and stuck at nothing. It could inspire such mighty saints as Theresa and John of the Cross, such heroes as Don John of Austria and the Prince of Parma ; but it was equally aglow in the fires

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

of the Inquisition, and its zeal could find vent in monstrous cruelty, in cold-blooded treachery and secret murder. It was a spirit that transcended the bounds of nationalism ; Catholic diehards all over Europe were ready to put the Faith and the Crusade before their own country. In moral and material resources it seemed to possess an overwhelming superiority. A great General Council of the Church was putting the finishing touches to a redefined orthodoxy. It only remained to confirm the unity of Christendom in arms, and do so, and more also, to the Protestant, as to the Arian and Albigensian heresies of the past. For Rome had awakened like a man out of sleep and like a giant refreshed with wine, and England, having for a second time thrown off her allegiance, stood right in her path—the path of the crusade.

Hopelessly inferior in resources, and with this tremendous moral impetus behind her enemies, on what countervailing force had she now to rely ? For it would be absurd to pretend that her second swing over to Protestantism was the result of a sudden and general conversion. She was more than ready to accept any patched-up compromise that would shelve the dogmatic issue and leave her free to mind her own worldly business.

But to inspire a forlorn hope against a crusade, something more is needed than a *foi de convenance*. And on the Continent, Protestantism was already developing a left wing movement, capable of meeting the Counter-Reformation with an intransigence equal to its own. A new model militant and democratic Protestantism, devised by the Latin genius of Jean Calvin, was put into practice of uncompromising tyranny in the holy city of Geneva. The germs of this were certainly planted in England, but as yet they were no more than germs. Nothing so uncompromisingly radical was calculated to make a swift conquest of the English mind. But the menace of the Counter-Reformation was as imminent as it was overwhelming, and the answering spirit could

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

not afford to wait upon the slow process of growth. It must come into full play during this immediate crisis, or it would be too late. Sectarian fanaticism was, therefore, ruled out ; there could be no question of a counter-crusade in the religious sense. Protestant enthusiasm might be a powerful auxiliary, but it could not be a prime factor of national resistance.

It came to this, that if England was to remain a free country the patriotism of her sons had got to be sufficient unto itself. The love of the reformed or any other religion was palpably insufficient to unite the whole country in that ardency of self-confidence and self-sacrifice which is the effective will to victory. This ideal, towards which she had only just begun to feel her way, of an independent civilization—was it so supremely worth her while, that it could inspire her to do and dare to the uttermost ? Such was the question that the last of the Tudors, that proud young goddess with the flaming hair, unhesitatingly elected to answer for herself and subjects in the affirmative. For she was one—and the words are her own—to stick at nothing.

Believers—if they still exist—in a special Providence watching over the destinies of England, might find a relevant significance in those first words of hers, on hearing that she was Queen :

“ This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.”

It may seem a far cry from Alfred to Elizabeth, from England’s Darling to Gloriana, but they have this in common, that each, at an hour of supreme national crisis, proved to be endowed with precisely those qualities that the situation demanded, and to so unique a degree that it would be plausible to say, “ No one else could have pulled the country through.”

This is not to imply that Elizabeth was, in the ordinary sense of the word, a good woman. That could have been said much less equivocally of her sister Mary, whose single-hearted devotion to her faith kept her steadfastly

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

up to the mark of combustion. Elizabeth was religious in her own worldly way, and an accomplished theologian, but she was never enough interested in the differences between Protestant and Catholic to wish to burn anyone's, and least of all her own little finger. She seems at heart to have been of almost exactly the same mind as her great contemporary the Mogul Akbar, in that she believed that all sectarian differences could be composed by the exercise of a little common sense ; there was, she said, one faith, and one Jesus Christ, and all the rest was mere trifling.

Her reputation has suffered from the fact that even now, after so many attempts to pluck the heart out of her mystery, few if any of her critics have succeeded in grasping that which her Tudor intuition had revealed to her from the first, and formed the mainspring of her statecraft. She is saddled, in the eyes of posterity, with endless evasions and procrastinations and with a grasping close-fistedness. She was guilty on both counts, but her guilt is the measure of her greatness. Without it she could never have saved England.

It could have been said of Elizabeth as truly as it had been of Quintus Fabius Maximus, that she alone, by procrastination, restored the fortunes of the State. Her way—and the only way in which the thing could have been done—was by spinning out time. England, as she found it, was in no condition to put up a straight fight against the great Catholic crusade. She needed to be nursed back, through the space of at least a generation, into strength and unity ; to be kept at all costs and by any means, from a direct, head-on collision with the power of Spain and the Indies. That supreme test must inevitably be undergone, sooner or later, but it was Elizabeth's business to go on putting it off and putting it off till a new England had come into being, capable of sustaining it. And meanwhile every penny of her own and England's resources must be jealously conserved. The English monarchy was not like those of the Continent ; it had

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

no army ; to ask for taxes was to ask for revolution ; the luxuries of a dashing or fighting policy were ruled out of a wise monarch's calculations. And of that Tudor wisdom Elizabeth was fully seised. Saint she was not ; a conquering heroine, on the model of Henry V, she dared not be ; what qualified her to become the saviour of her country was that from first to last she understood her task—the duty of the moment—and did it with consummate success.

It was the essence of that task to foster an English patriotism of at least equivalent strength to the holy zeal of the Counter-Reformation. And to do this it was necessary that she should focus it upon herself, that she should identify the love of Elizabeth with the love of England, and pride in Elizabeth with pride in England. It was to this that she dedicated her life, and like so many other great women devotees—her virginity. Her own words, so often and grandly reiterated, show that she did so in full consciousness :

“ I care not for myself,” she had said, at the beginning of her reign, “ my life is not dear to me. My care is for my people.” And at the end of her long course, the note is precisely the same :

“ This,” she told her last Parliament, “ I count the glory of my crown, that I have reigned with your loves. . . . Of myself,” she went on, and it is at the bar of history that she pleads, “ I must say this, I never was any greedy scraping grasper, nor a strait, fast-holding prince, nor yet a waster ; my heart was never set on worldly goods, but only for my subjects' good.”

I, for one, find it easier to believe that the woman—with all her faults—was speaking the truth that was in her, than accept the hateful or fantastic caricature that is the fashion of the debunking biographer.¹ In England, at least, there is reason that her name should endure for ever

¹ One characteristic title on library shelves was recently *Bad Queen Bess*. But on the other hand we have the generous and scholarly estimate of Professor J. E. Neale.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

under the sun, among the posterities that shall be blessed through her.

It was not as if Elizabeth had found patriotism ready born among her subjects, or could have had a reasonable expectation of its springing up fully armed of its own accord. When she came to the throne, the country was in the lowest depth of depression. There was scarcely the faintest foretaste anywhere of that joyous exuberance that we associate with the name Elizabethan. And it might well have been doubted whether the country had even the will to patriotism; whether it was not split down the middle by religious differences. That was what her arch enemy, King Philip, kept banking on to the end. If he could only land a striking force—that was the calculation behind the Armada—half England, the Catholic half, would rise and join it. And there are historians to-day who do not believe him to have been so far out.

Nor can it be said that these men who put their religion before their country were at any disadvantage of morale. Rather the reverse. The records of Elizabethan patriotism, even at its latest and brightest, can scarcely produce anything to compare with the self-immolating devotion of those English Catholic missionaries who, in their seminaries abroad, were trained for a martyrdom on whose worst horrors they were taught to feed their imaginations. That tremendous stimulus of mystic ecstasy, which was to so large an extent the driving power of the Catholic crusade, was, in fact, conspicuously lacking in Protestant England. Not even in Shakespeare is there the remotest comprehension of saintliness. And we shall be hard put to it to discover, in that Church of which Elizabeth modestly declined to be more than Supreme Governor, the record of even a colorable saint. Its glory must be in having produced such a paragon of erudite urbanity as Archbishop Parker, or so coolly common-sense a theologian as that modest country parson of whom it is impossible to think as anything else but the judicious Hooker.

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

The Elizabethan settlement was, in fact, not so much religious, as an attempt to let religion, as far as might be, mind its own business, and cease to distract men's minds from the love and service of their country. Elizabeth was no Protestant heroine—it is only in a very equivocal sense that she can be called Protestant at all. She was no more favourable to the Calvinist than the Catholic zealots—both alike were a political nuisance, and to their sectarian differences her attitude was that of Gallio. And in this she was merely true to her chosen role of patriot sovereign. For in the great issue that was to be fought out, of Protestant versus Catholic, both causes were essentially supernational. Mr. Belloc has exactly hit it off in talking of the Geneva International. He might equally well have spoken of a Rome, or a Madrid, International. But not even Mr. Belloc, at his most controversial, would talk of an Anglican International. For once, the nature of the thing is revealed in the name—the Church of England.

As Camden, that most wise and penetrating of all contemporary observers, puts it : “ By this alteration of religion England . . . became of all the kingdoms of Christendom the most free, the sceptre, as it were, manumitted from the foreign servitude of the Bishop of Rome, and more wealthy than in former ages, an infinite mass of money being stayed at home. . . . ”

As far, therefore, as such a thing was conceivable in that age, we may say that Elizabeth's life was one of absolute religious, or at least of sectarian, neutrality. She might have said of her England, as truly as Cavour would one day say of his Italy—*farà di se*.

This is no place to follow the workings of a statesmanship whose mastery entitles it to rank high among the achievements even of that time. We might—though with a certain reservation—talk of her government as being one by Council under a Cecil Premiership, which down to his death, only five years before her own, meant that of the great Lord Burleigh. It is, perhaps, doing

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

it too much honour to pay serious attention to the propaganda, masking as history, that would make Elizabeth, of all people, a helpless pawn in the power of a tyrant minister. The notion would have brought a bitter smile to the lips of the poor statesman, at his wits' end to keep on the right side of his imperious mistress. But Elizabeth, with all her moods and all her handsome favourites, knew how to give as well as to attract loyalty, and there is no more touching scene than that of her sitting by her old counsellor's death-bed, feeding him with her own royal hands. She had the faculty not only of forming, but also—what is hardly recorded of any other woman in history—of captaining the ablest side of ministers that her own, or any other country, was capable of producing. Hers was always the last word ; hers, too, the magic of inspiration—the Napoleonic overplus that makes the team more than the sum of its units.

It was that hardest of all games she had to play, one of spinning out time and husbanding resources. It wanted thirty years to build up the physical and spiritual power of England. Then, perhaps, but not till then, would it be possible to challenge trial by battle with the massed forces of the great crusade, and scatter them to all the winds of heaven. After that, perhaps, might come the harvest of creative beauty which crowns a golden age.

But till then nothing brilliant, no stroke of policy to capture the imagination—unless it was the timely and economical application of military force that, within two years of her accession, converted that ancient bugbear, the Franco-Scottish alliance, into a Protestant Anglo-Scottish Entente—and thus made the reduction of an insignificant French garrison, at Leith, accomplish more than a score of victories had been able to do. But for the rest it was a policy of continual evasion abroad, and of patient reconstruction at home. Patriotism must have time to consolidate, on this new basis of insular self-sufficiency.

The Queen had a part in this process that she alone

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

could fulfil. More than ever, in the absence of a religious motive, there was need of some concrete symbolism on which the emotions could fasten. No man hath seen England at any time. But in Elizabeth it was as if the geographical abstraction had taken flesh, and become the object of every man's love, a goddess in human form :

“As she goes, all hearts do duty
Unto her beauty ;
And enamoured do wish, so they might
But enjoy such a sight,
That they still were to run by her side,
Through swords, through seas, whither she would ride.”

The extravagance of this cult has been a thing of amazement and ridicule to a remote posterity. They read of poets and courtiers making extravagant love to a bald woman in a wig, with none the less fervour even after she had turned sixty. But the Elizabethans knew very well what they were about. They were playing at religion with their eyes open. Gloriana had worshippers ; she had no theologians. Essex and Raleigh, at their most extravagant, were no more hypocrites than the actors in a masque are hypocrites. They did not seriously mistake her for a goddess, and she was the last woman to credit them with doing so. She was an actress manager, playing the leading part in a piece of extravagant pageantry ; and playing it as in duty bound to make the most of it. But so seriously did the minor performers, her subjects, throw themselves into the spirit of the drama, that they showed themselves in very truth capable of braving swords and seas for her sake, and a Puritan, whose right hand had been cut off on a charge of sedition, could instantly wave his cap with the left, and cry, “ God save the Queen ! ”

There was not the least trace of sentimentalism or self-deception about this essential feature of her statecraft. Like other successful actress managers, she was as hard bitten a woman of business as ever trod the boards. The fact of a good looking young man having played the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

juvenile lead with her, was not the least reason for allowing him to make a nuisance of himself. Even he who played Sweet Robin to her had got to account for the last farthing—or she would know the reason why.

And in real life, as well as pageantry, she had her part to play. If she was a goddess, she was a constitutional English monarch, a Tudor, and with a Tudor's intuitive knowledge of the rules of that game. As a woman, she might perhaps stretch the privilege of her sex beyond the strict letter of the law ; she was in the habit of coquetting no less outrageously with her Parliaments than with her favourites, but never so as to forfeit their affections. For if things looked really serious, she had also in reserve the woman's resource of making so sweet a surrender as to bind their affections with stronger cords than before.

The Gloriana of Elizabeth was, in fact, the English reply to the Madonna of the Counter-Reformation. Only she was less of a mother goddess than a fairy princess, and her subjects rather her lovers than her children. The worship that surrounded her was as extravagant in intensity as in form ; even more than her father she was felt to be like the King at chess, whose protection is the object of the whole game. Her enemies felt it too. To eliminate her by assassination would be the equivalent of a surprise mate ; the doctors of the Counter-Reformation were more than equal to justifying such a procedure, and her ex-suitor and brother-in-law, Philip, would as gladly have brought it off against her as he did against that other heretic chief, William of Orange. And in 1570 a Pontiff, with too much zeal to be diplomatic, put her formally out of the law by the dread sentence of excommunication, and laid the same curse on all of her subjects who refused to be traitors to her allegiance. It was signalling her out, in the eyes of Europe, as public enemy in chief, "the servant of wickedness," and a plain incitement to all whom it might concern to get rid of her. It was also just the sort of challenge, by a foreigner, to rally the whole spirit of the country to her defence.

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

It was during the years of almost unimaginable tension that intervened between this open proclamation of the Crusade and its actual launching, that Elizabethan patriotism was kindled to a white heat round the person of the Queen, and prepared for the final stage of conscious transference to the country itself. The power of Spain impended like a thunder-cloud, but still the storm did not break. There was the Catholic Queen of Scots, a state prisoner, but the centre of all plots and hopes against Elizabeth, and ready to take her place on the throne the moment she ceased to exist. There was secret if not open war of Catholic emissaries, and particularly of all-pervading Jesuits ; and to meet it, what amounted to martial law—a very different thing, in spirit, from the burning of heretics, since its object was one of common self-preservation. There was another war, open enough but not official, of individual adventurers on the high seas whose motives ranged over the whole scale from patriotism to piracy.

Beneath which stress and confusion, England was beginning to find herself. The first stage was the recovery of confidence, and this was a plant of painfully slow growth. Had Elizabeth succumbed to one of the many attempts to remove her, after even a score of years on the throne, we should think of the Elizabethan time as one of the most depressed and depressing in history. The thin trickle of literature is marked by one constant note of gloom, and anything suggestive of patriotism is conspicuous by its absence. And then, in the mid years of the reign, the fire is kindled—but it is a fire not of a common national purpose, but a rampant and defiant individualism, corresponding to that of the adventurers and buccaneers. It is a time of sheer uncontrolled energy bursting vent like lava from an erupting volcano—the wild and whirling word play that was called euphuism, a veritable orgy of perverted taste ; and the wilder extravagance and bombast of the pre-Shakespearean drama, which culminates in the inspired rant of Marlowe, that apostle of the will to power unlimited.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Those stage heroes who sup full on horrors and glory in sadism, only too faithfully reflect the mood of those other heroes who were beginning to spread the fame and terror of the English name to the uttermost parts of the earth. Some of them, and a steadily increasing proportion, were heroes in the highest sense, men of patriotic devotion and religious principles, and it is sheer nonsense to lump such as Drake under the odious appellation of pirate. But there were among them enough and to spare of out and out ruffians, though of a magnificence that renders even ruffianism attractive, men who did not turn a hair at becoming Moslem corsairs, or—like the once famous Stukeley—hiring themselves out to the Queen's enemies.

It was the high task of Elizabeth and her statesmen not only to nurse and foster this energy, but to give it the unity and direction that in its growing phase it so conspicuously lacked. That was where her role of goddess proved so indispensable; these uncontrolled knights errant could at least unite in the service of the same lady. And time, provided it could be gained, would reveal what this service really implied—that Elizabeth was to be worshipped not for herself but for the England she symbolized; until there came the last and most pathetic phase of all, when the grand old lady had so thoroughly accomplished her task as to have put her own symbolism out of date—patriotism being able to stand on its own foundations without all this elaborate scaffolding. Her last years were terribly lonely; for she had served her people so well as to have rendered their love superfluous.

The culminating point of the reign was the great crisis that was precipitated by the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, and resolved by the great naval battle off Gravelines, in which, so far from "He blew with his winds and they were scattered", the wind changed just in the nick of time to prevent the whole Spanish Armada finishing then and there on the sandbanks of Zeeland. Humanly speaking, the collapse of the great crusade was no matter of luck (which was throughout particularly

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

kind to the Spaniard), or of Providence, but of thirty years' masterly preparation and still more masterly procrastination. Gloriana had nursed and trained up her team till she could be reasonably certain that it was invincible both in resources and morale. During all that time she, and her country, were gambling on the ever-diminishing prospects of her surviving the rival whom she was maintaining in security to hatch mortal conspiracy against both. The country had got sick of it long before she did—it was all that even she could do to preserve the nuisance in being until she dared deprive the Counter-Reformation, and Philip, of the almost bloodless solution on which they, for their part, were gambling. Even when the cup was full, and the patience of her subjects strained to breaking-point, her heart, rather than her brain, kept her back from the final step; until her counsellors, with understanding loyalty, took whatever there was of blood-guiltiness on their own heads, by forwarding the death-warrant to Fotheringay.

Popular tradition is truly inspired in its estimate of the Armada episode as one of the great decisive events of English, and indeed of human, history. It was the final acceptance and ratification of a decision that had been taken provisionally half a century back, that of England to work out her own independent destiny and to renounce for all time whatever membership she might have had in Roman or Continental civilization. That, I submit, is the plain fact of the situation, however we choose to react to it. From a certain standpoint it may be regarded as an act of supreme treason to God and man, which committed the human species to effect its own destruction in an anarchy of nations. Or, on the other hand, it may be regarded as the sole conceivable means of offering it a way of free progress as an alternative to that of a law of mechanization whose end is death.

But having, for better or worse, made the decision, Elizabeth and her statesmen displayed a superb realization of the means whereby it was to be made good. First

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

and foremost, if England was to be in the fullest sense an insular and not a Continental Power, she must have such command of her surrounding seas as to forbid any access to her shores except by her leave. The combined efforts of her shipbuilders and sea dogs did, in fact, enable her to encounter what was in effect the Mediterranean grand fleet, with one fully adapted to the conditions of ocean warfare and capable of shooting its great hulks to shambles.

The inviolability of her shores was the first and permanent result secured by that great decision. But there was something more subtle that the sure intuition of Elizabeth and her councillors had perceived, namely, that however independent England might be of the Continent, she could never be disinterested in it. She never dared take her independence for granted. Against anything like the united strength of Europe, or even so much of Europe as remained in the Catholic communion, she must have gone under. It was henceforward a matter of life or death to her to preserve a balance of power ; in other words, to throw in her whole weight against any one Power that threatened to dominate the rest or, in particular, that part of the Continent from which she was most vulnerable. It was when Spain had tried to change its loose personal union with the Netherlands into armed sovereignty that even Elizabeth's ultra pacific government had hazarded the daring and deadly stroke of intercepting the pay chest of her military governor, the Duke of Alva.

To put it plainly, England, having dissociated herself from the ideal of a united Europe, had made it her business to prevent that ideal from ever materializing, even on the mainland, on any other basis than that of free and equal association. A league of nations—perhaps ; a second Rome—never !

Finally, the crisis had brought into full and flaming consciousness the patriotism of a united England. The beacon fires that the first sight of the Armada had set blazing from end to end of the land were its visible token.

THE WAR OF ENGLISH INDEPENDENCE

Even the majority of Catholics, despite Philip's calculations, despite even the natural but very humiliating restraint under which the Government had felt itself constrained to put them, remained deaf to the call of the crusade, and pressed their services upon their "natural and sweet country".¹ The sea dogs ceased to forage for themselves, and hunted in pack all the way up the Channel. Gloriana, a crowned Victory, was more the national goddess than ever, but now her worship was becoming merged in that of the nation itself. The most inspired praises, in the great period of creative genius that was only now beginning, were not for her, but for the England for which she had so long stood proxy.

This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land ! Never before or since has there been such a chorus of patriotism. The greater the genius, the clearer the note. Shakespeare's chronicle plays are so many variations on this one theme. But, indeed, all the Elizabethans are consumed by the same fire, and vie with each other in the exuberance of a common love.

Here we are only concerned to note something of its elements and its limitations. The Elizabethan patriotism was a singularly straightforward and unsophisticated emotion. It was content, for the most part, to love still—as one contemporary song says—and know not why, or, at any rate, to make no deep analysis of that in which England was lovable.

One thing had now become rooted in the Englishman's consciousness, and that was the legend of his own invincibility. The Armada had confirmed the impression of Agincourt, for popular imagination had visualized that contest, quite falsely, as one of David against Goliath :

"Courage noble Englishmen
And never be dismayed,
If that we be but one to ten
We will not be afraid,
To fight with foreign enemies
And set our country free. . . ."

¹ Thus Lord Morley.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

With men like Sir Richard Grenville, of the *Revenge*, who went out of his way to fight one against fifty, this was a gross understatement. It may have been the very madness of auto-suggestion, but it was a case where the belief is the half-way house to its own realization.

This conviction of invincibility was now based upon an ingrained sea-consciousness. The famous dying speech of John of Gaunt, in *Richard II*, which is by far the most comprehensive statement of patriotism the age produced, brings this out very clearly. England is a natural fortress, with the sea its moat or, alternatively, its wall ; and not only a fortress but—and here comes one of those surprises of depth-lighting intuition of which only Shakespeare is capable—"a little world". For it was just this that England had made herself invincible to become—a world of her own, working out its own destiny in perfect freedom.

But not even Shakespeare, still less his fellow Elizabethans, had seriously begun to consider whither this might lead. It was enough to link her freedom to that ultimate ideal of the Shakespearian philosophy, for nations as for men, that of her resting true to herself.

But what might be the nature of that truth ? With what new spiritual birth was England beginning to quicken ? Why should she cut loose from her European moorings for this dark voyage into the unknown ?

To that the Elizabethans, even the greatest of them, had as yet no answer. And, indeed, it is seldom John Bull's way to formulate his principles in advance. He prefers to go straight ahead, trusting to his instinct, and leave the principles, in due course, to reveal themselves from within.

CHAPTER IV

PATRIOTISM TURNS INWARD

So long as the ship of state was battling with the hurricane, all that mattered was to keep a steady hand on the helm. So long as the pilot did not forcibly seize command of the ship, which was what had happened in other vessels, the precise nature of his authority could await fair-weather definition. But now, by pluck and seamanship, the peril had been surmounted; the Counter-Reformation had shot its bolt, the boggy of Spain was laid, and by a crowning mercy Britain had become an island in the fullest sense, since a century's preparation, in council and bridal chamber, had at last borne fruit, a union of Crowns between England and Scotland. And the first thing the new Sovereign set himself to do was to closure—with characteristic wisdom—the nuisance of an Anglo-Spanish war. It was fair weather indeed.

The country, therefore, was at long last free to indulge in the luxury of introspection. The House of Stuart was faced with an utterly different problem from that of the Tudors, one of less vital urgency, but requiring even greater delicacy of handling—the more so from its being so little apparent on the surface. For to all appearance King James had come south to rule a loyal and united nation; he need have no fear of invasion from abroad or rebellion from within; he had only to carry on with the existing system, for the political equivalent of "happy ever afterwards". The last thing he could have expected would have been that in less than half a century the Sovereign would be publicly butchered in front of his own palace, and the very institution of monarchy put out of the law.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

The unfolding of this tragedy is of all phases of history that which demands the maturest wisdom for its comprehension. It is so very easy to take a side, and explain it all by some more or less simple formula. Half a century ago, it was pretty generally agreed that it was a plain melodrama of patriots against tyrants. And then, as the Whig fashion went out of date, it became more and more manifestly difficult to reconcile the facts with this interpretation. The patriots turned out to be about the queerest candidates for that title who had ever been put forward, and the tyrants to be striving for ends that, judged by ordinary standards, were incomparably more statesmanlike and public-spirited. It was only human, under these circumstances, for the pendulum to swing royalist, not only in sentiment but principle. It is hard, indeed, to rise to the conclusion that in the game of real life it is sometimes well for the baser to overcome the nobler opponent. The merit of a cause is not always to be measured by that of its supporters.

Providence, or fortune, does certainly seem to have weighted the scales against the House of Stuart. Not only was every one of its mistakes mercilessly punished, and its best works turned to the means of its own undoing, but it had succeeded—in despite of fair appearances—to a position as nearly impossible as that of any monarchy could have been. Even the great Elizabeth, in all her sunset glory, had only by a tact amounting to genius prevented the long smouldering discontents of her subjects from bursting into open flame. The days of the Tudor system were numbered, and the writing on the wall was—or ought to have been—plain to read while she was yet alive.

For what had that system amounted to, but the addition of just so much of martial law to the ordinary working of the Constitution as was needed to tide the country over a period of acute emergency? It is true that the crisis had stretched itself out for more than a century, but this is nothing abnormal in the perspective of historical time.

PATRIOTISM TURNS INWARD

The last embers of baronial anarchy had not been fairly stamped out, when the even direr and twin perils of foreign conquest and civil war of religion had supervened. Some other means had to be found of preserving liberty than that of perpetuating despotism, and this the national genius successfully accomplished by strengthening the hands of the Government just as much, and as long, as the occasion demanded. Now that the emergency was past, emergency measures had lost their justification. It was time to get the Constitution back to a peace footing.

But who was to understand these things at a time when people had not even begun to think in terms of the Constitution, and when the effect of strains and stresses on the social body had hardly begun to be studied, except in the light of each man's personal intuition? It is just conceivable, though scarcely more than possible, that another Tudor, with the almost uncanny sense of his House for the realities of English life, might have realized that the Elizabethan *status quo* could no longer be maintained, and that the time had come for the Crown to effect a masterly retreat from its most advanced positions. But such inspired self-denial—if it comes within the scope of royal nature—would be too much to expect of a foreigner, whose whole technique of kingcraft had been learned in conditions subtly, yet fundamentally, alien from those of English life. Who could blame him for accepting the situation as he found it and taking to himself intact such powers as had been bequeathed him?

On his progress down the North Road to his new capital, King James had already started the ball moving by innocently doing that which neither Elizabeth nor Great Harry himself would ever have dared. A thief had been caught red-handed among his retinue, and His Majesty had had the fellow strung up without the formalities prescribed by the English Common Law. As he would certainly have been hung anyhow, it must have seemed plain Scottish thrift to do it at once; oblivious

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

of the English point of view that certain things are not done.

The fact was that just as no one had ever mastered the use of the English long bow who had not been trained to it from childhood, so no one was likely to acquire a mentality in tune with the English tradition who had been brought up in its direct opposite, as the Stuarts had been ; for the Roman Law had conquered Scotland as it had conquered Germany. For this reason, if for no other, James would have been bound to cling with special affection to the most Roman-principled element in the English system, namely, that Church which accepted, in so unqualified a sense, the divine right of its Governor to govern.

Unfortunately it is easier to make bricks without straw than to govern without money, and it was the ill luck of the Stuarts to be expected to live of their own on a fixed rent roll with a pound reduced to the pre-Tudor equivalent of five shillings. To do this even on a peacetime basis was only possible by discovering some source of expanding revenue, which in this case meant tapping the profits of trade by exploiting the ancient right of the Crown to levy customs, a source that James proposed to enrich by means of a flexible tariff, and which Parliament, in the reign of his son, asserted its right to cut off altogether. Unless by heroic feats of cheeseparing, and renunciation of any but a purely passive role in European affairs, even this disputed allowance would not suffice for the barest necessities of the nation's business, within the limits of the law, or without putting Parliament in a position to levy revolutionary blackmail on the Crown.

These underlying realities of the situation were so effectively camouflaged by the verbiage of loyalty and obedience—not consciously insincere—that even at this day they are only beginning to be realized. Is it any wonder they should have been hidden from the unfortunate Stuarts, with their complete lack of English experience ?

PATRIOTISM TURNS INWARD

We hear a great deal of talk about divine right, as if this were some crazy obsession of King James and King Charles, instead of the reasoned basis of kingship all over civilized Europe. It was merely the Roman principle applied locally. The sovereign was a Divine Cæsar, his sovereignty an empire, in miniature. "The State," as the model of all Continental monarchs was to put it, "am I." And in the militant anarchy of Continental nations, it not only seemed, but *was* obvious, that only by such concentration of power and prestige in one unfettered control could any individual competitor stand a chance of surviving. England alone, by virtue of her protecting sea, could afford to maintain the head of her State without armed force to back his will and without the necessary funds for efficient administration.

Not to realize these things, almost compels us to pass false judgment on the protagonists in the drama. King James *must* have been a fool and King Charles a tyrant to make it credible. James in particular is one of the licensed butts of history; and he certainly was one of the least dignified monarchs that ever sat on a throne. But he was also one of the ablest and, up to the time of his coming to England, of the most successful; the only one of his House to make good, or even to survive, in the Sisyphean labour of Scottish Kingship. He brought his mature wisdom, as well as his rich stock of physical infirmities, to England, and in the guiding motives of his Kingcraft—as he himself called it—he was almost infallibly right. Peace-lover and peace-maker, he stood firm against every temptation to be drawn into militancy; he would have anticipated by a century the union, under one Parliament, of his two Kingdoms; it was by his initiative that Anglo-Saxon civilization was endowed with the Authorized Version of the Bible. It was only when he came up against that strange idiosyncrasy of the English way of life that the light that was in him turned to darkness. He could see nothing in Parliament but a body without a head, and a confusion of tongues; nor had he

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

any clue to the mazy sanctities of Common Law. He could give England good government, but not good English government.

But then, how was he—or his son after him—to realize these things? For we must remember that, at the opening of the seventeenth century, not even the idea of Parliament, much less of the Common Law, had become invested with anything like the national significance they have since acquired. Shakespeare could dramatize the reign of King John and forget all about Magna Charta. It needed something of a prophet to reveal what was latent in the spirit of the time. And the man who played this part, to the extent of becoming the real father of the English revolution, happened to possess about the most uncouth mind and unlikable personality of any contemporary Englishman. Sir Edward Coke, “tough old Coke upon Littleton” as Carlyle calls him, as brutal and grasping in his family relations as in his legal practice, did nevertheless worship the Common Law of England in such a spirit of priestly devotion as has inspired the past masters of esoteric mysteries. He alone could find his way through that forest undergrowth of statute and precedent; his opinion on any point of law became invested with an infallibility hardly less than pontifical. As is the way with such natures, the law became the sublimation of his lust for power; subconsciously he identified his own colossal egotism with its magnification.

Thus, in his position of Lord Chief Justice, he became that most intractable of national phenomena, a litigious Englishman sticking out for the last letter of his rights and refusing to budge one inch for fear or persuasion. It was the drama of Becket revived in a legal setting. And it was an answer worthy of Becket that the Lord Chief Justice returned, when His Majesty put down his foot and ordered him to drop some highly technical point of encroachment on his own governorship of the Church: “I shall do,” he said, “that which an honest and just judge ought to do.” The answer to which,

PATRIOTISM TURNS INWARD

in a State governed by Totalitarian principles, might well have been,

“Argal, the gallows shall do well to thee.”

James was at least enough of a Totalitarian in principle to dismiss Coke forthwith for his pains. But he had no more disposed of him than Henry II, by a cruder process of martyrdom, had disposed of Becket. The old lawyer had merely descended, like some sacrificial deity, into the underworld, to rise again in a mightier incarnation. As one of His Majesty's Judges, even Coke was amenable to a certain discipline; as a Member of Parliament he could be neither controlled nor dismissed. And with the meeting of James's third Parliament, in 1620, the relations of Crown and Commons were more and more plainly passing from the stage of friction to one of undisguised conflict, a civil war in spirit if not yet in action.

It was the presence of Coke that gave direction and unity to the simmering discontents of men who still, in the mass, believed themselves to be actuated by the purest loyalty. What he did was to apply the principles of the Common Law to the highest affairs of state. The King, with every appearance of reason, asked for the means and freedom to carry on the nation's business efficiently. To which Coke replied, in effect, that if John Doe got his rights and Richard Roe was secured in his liberties, as by law defined, efficiency could take care of itself.

Now we may safely say that in any other country of Europe, such an attitude would have been one of suicidal lunacy. A country needs to be very secure whose elected representatives can afford to paralyse its administration in the name of the law. It is literally true to say that whereas in the 1580's the right true end of patriotism had consisted in defeating the power of Spain; so now, in the 1620's, it had begun to be almost equally bent—so far, at any rate, as the sense of the Houses is a guide

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

to it—upon hamstringing the power of an English Sovereign, even after he had been pushed by Parliament and public opinion into war with Spain.

Never was there such a record of successful wrecking as that of the five Parliaments that came and went during this decade. They strike down the most trusted ministers of the Crown by impeachment or incitement to murder ; they allow armies and fleets to go forth so miserably ill found as to doom them in advance. What, in the reckoning of the new patriotism, are the lives of a few thousand wretched recruits ?

And, indeed, when judged by their works, the patriot heroes of Whig legend would seem to be equivocal candidates for canonization. They were certainly as different as possible from the dauntless breasted and simple-hearted country squires of popular imagination. They were almost without exception plutocrats or, like John Pym, the sort of politicians on the make whose careers plutocrats find it expedient, in their own interests, to finance. In the great third Parliament of Charles I, the one that carried through the Petition of Right, the Poor Commons were so rolling in money that it was computed they could have bought out the Upper House three times over ! In those stately Elizabethan mansions that had replaced the monasteries as a feature of the country landscape, and to whose stateliness the loot of these same monasteries had contributed, speculation, the exploitation of monopolies, all the various means by which money can be made to make money, were certainly much to the fore in the minds of the owners. Money was beginning to talk, and not only to talk, but to conspire.

To anyone who comes to study the facts with an unprejudiced mind, it must be clear that the eventual leaders of the Long Parliament, Pym, Hampden, and their associates, were a ring of capitalist bosses who for years had been associated not only in political, but company promoting, activities of a highly dubious nature. The only essential difference—and it is one that must

PATRIOTISM TURNS INWARD

be allowed full weight—between their methods and those of pure Tammany, is that they did not, like the statesmen of the next generation, make a practice of feathering their individual nests with bribes. But it would be hard to name one single shady device, even of modern politics, which they had not in some measure anticipated ; and in the day of their power there was hardly a constitutional principle that they did not trample underfoot, or known expedient of tyranny that they hesitated to employ. And the measure of the faith in Parliamentary liberties, that they were never tired of proclaiming, may be taken from the fact that their greatest triumph of all consisted in passing a Bill whose effect was to turn Parliament from a representative assembly to an irresponsible oligarchy, incapable of being dissolved except by its own consent.

By their fruits and not their flowers of rhetoric shall men be known. And yet not even rhetoric itself is entirely fruitless. Lip homage, when it is taken seriously, may work all the miracles of faith, and men survive in the characters they have imposed on posterity. The real John Hampden may have been no more than a millionaire wirepuller, with nothing more positive to his credit than his having been put up to finance a propagandist law-suit ; but the very different John Hampden of legend, the patriot hero, goes marching through time in the vanguard of British liberty, and never having existed, yet speaketh.

It is a temptation of historians to allow their judgment of events to be biased by like or dislike of their human causes. But the perfume of the rose is not marred by any unsavouriness of its bedding manure. In this high debate between Crown and Parliament our present concern is not so much with the motives or merits of the disputants, as with its effects in widening and deepening the conception of English patriotism. And for this, whether we like it or not, we must thank the success of the Parliamentary leaders. Had they been suppressed there would have been

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

no civil war, and perhaps no eventual dispossession of the peasantry ; but it is more than doubtful whether there would have been any Commonwealth of Nations.

For looking back at it now we can see that the Tudor system, which the Stuarts had taken over and which they were committed to defend, had got to be broken down—by fair means or foul—if the growth of the essential England was to continue. For though the Tudors had destroyed nothing and suppressed nothing vital to that growth, they had overlaid it with a great many additional powers and prerogatives that had no doubt been needed to tide over a state of emergency, but were perfectly incapable of being grafted on to the English stem. Star Chamber justice, necessary as it had been to maintain simple folk in their right against what the old Saxon Chronicle had called “devils and wicked men”, was essentially a Totalitarian, or imperial expedient ; the still half-civilized fringe of Wales and Northumbria could not be disciplined in perpetuity by sub-committees of the Royal Council ; least of all would it be possible for the King to go on doubling the parts of constitutional Sovereign in his temporal and Divine Cæsar in his spiritual capacity. Sooner or later, even in illogical England, it had got to be one thing or the other, a State on the insular or the Continental model.

The Stuarts, who would no doubt, in the abstract, have preferred the latter, can hardly be blamed for accepting the compromise they had inherited, and doing their best to make it work. They would have been more or less than human had they volunteered such an abdication of sovereignty as it took a war and two revolutions to compel. Nor, if they had abandoned their function of governing, is there reason to believe that they would have found the opposition prepared, or even willing, to take it over. When, driven to desperation, Charles I did actually offer to form a ministry of the Long Parliament leaders, his offer was declined. It is more than doubtful whether Pym and his associates were remotely

PATRIOTISM TURNS INWARD

capable of redeeming the nation from a chaos they themselves had precipitated. They had neither administrative experience nor constructive ability ; wreckers they were, and wreckers they would remain.

On the other hand, the bitterest critics of the Crown could hardly deny its willingness or capacity to govern, or to enlist the statesmanlike pick of the country in its service. James I, the only one of English Kings since Alfred to have been as deeply versed in the theory as the practice of government, could reinforce his own proved abilities by the genius—until death or Parliament struck them down—of Salisbury, Middlesex, and Bacon. King Charles, in his youthful inexperience, for four irretrievable years followed his father's prematurely senile example in yielding to the hypnotic plausibility of that stage hero, George Duke of Buckingham, at one time equally the spoiled darling of Parliament, and allowed himself to be drawn into the fatal error of burning his fingers, and his money, on the fringe of a European conflagration. For that both of them were hounded remorselessly to death, the minister by swift assassination, the Monarch with twenty years' stay of execution. Nevertheless, when the fearful shock of his friend's murder cured him of the tongue-tied self-mistrust that had been his undoing, Charles made one final and heroic attempt to keep the Tudor system in being, on the only possible basis—that of living lawfully of his own, without a Parliament that had become openly and intransigently an instrument of revolution.

That experiment forms one of the most moving and tragic episodes in history. The miracle is that it should have lasted as long, and come as near to success as it did, a miracle due partly to the personality of one who, if he had not been a great king, would probably have been an even greater artist ; partly to the two men of dominating, if fatal, genius who conceived and implemented the scheme of policy called Thorough—the equivalent of our modern so-many-years' plans—in Church and

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

State respectively : William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford.

Those eleven years were among the most disastrous that civilization has ever experienced both in themselves and in their consequences. The war of rival ideologies on the Continent had degenerated, as such wars inevitably must, into a soulless and pointless mêlée of "wild cats in a red-hot iron cage", into which nation after nation was drawn, and the effect of which was to convert central Europe into a depopulated wilderness sown with the seeds of unimaginable evil. Yet these same years were not only of peace for England, but of mounting and unexampled prosperity. It was not only that the King, following in his father's footsteps, had stood firm against every temptation to involve England in the madness of Protestant crusade, but that in practically every department of national life he, and his ministers, had pursued a policy of constructive progress that put into the shade even the great work accomplished under the auspices of the two Cecils. Most remarkable of all was the fact that the beginnings were made of a social policy not only in the fullest sense national, but quite two centuries in advance of its time, providing employment and a fair wage for all capable of earning it. The royal budget balanced without resort to taxation, trade booming, industry developing, the arts fostered, colonies planted overseas, the Church adorned as never before or since with what her Primate delighted in calling the beauty of holiness, even the eternal problem of governing Ireland brought nearer solution than anyone would have believed possible, and, in despite of factious and furious opposition, a royal navy equal to its task, all these things combining to make Britain seem a veritable island of the blest in comparison to the European Inferno—and yet something still lacking, some uneasy sense that all was not well with England; King Charles riding even through Oxford, the centre of loyalty, without a cheer—everywhere

PATRIOTISM TURNS INWARD

a feeling of suspense
In nature, a mysterious sense
Of terror in the air.

It was that most heroically tragic of all spectacles, of human will-power opposing itself to the march of destiny, and actually halting it—for a time. If Thorough had gone through to the end, it would have been the end of England—the only England that matters. King Charles may have been—he almost certainly was—desirous of nothing more than to preserve the balance of domestic power as it had been under the Tudors. But that compromise had ceased to correspond with reality. There was no longer any halting place between the two systems, continental and insular, the one emanating from the Divine Right of a Cæsar, the other based on the human and concrete liberties of John Doe and Richard Roe.

Sooner or later King Charles must have been forced to take the only possible means of stabilizing an equilibrium that, as it proved, the slightest disturbance could shatter. He must, like every one of his brother Sovereigns, have armed himself with a military power capable of upholding his authority, and putting him at least above the mercy of any propaganda-drunken mob in his own capital. There can be little doubt that the thunder-browed Yorkshireman, that all-or-nothing disciplinarian, Strafford, would have proved equal to this as he had been to every other requirement of Thorough. Another five years. . . .

There is no getting away from it—even peace, even prosperity and social justice, even empire can be bought too dear when the price is a nation's own soul. There is a higher patriotism than that of the main chance. It is not what we get, but what we bring to birth that ennobles our existence. The famous passage of Shakespeare, that proclaims England's invincibility by a world in arms, ends with the stipulation that she shall rest true to herself. Without that, she rests inviolate for nothing ; she is not even, in the fullest sense, England.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

That is the real tragedy of Charles I, not that he was a bad man or a bad King, but that, in self-defence, he had forced upon him a role in which his success would have been fatal to England. It was expedient that one man should die for the future.

CHAPTER V

AN ESSAY IN DICTATORSHIP

Rome and Geneva, those two great ideological opposites, have this at least in common, that they take no account of patriotism. Like Christianity itself, they are supernational, and if England had committed herself unreservedly to either of their ways, she would have gone European.

This was just what the Elizabethan Settlement had aimed at preventing. "England for the English" might have been its motto, "and a plague of both your crusades." You can read Shakespeare from beginning to end without ever realizing there was a religious war on, or that sectarian differences were worth bothering about. And Shakespeare's England would never have dreamed of going to war on a point of religion; what it was minded to fight about was its right to manage its affairs in its own way, without interference from the Bishop of Rome or any other foreigner.

But unfortunately, when a war is both long and doubtful, hatred of the enemy becomes an obsession that rationalizes itself by rushing to the opposite ideological extreme. And hatred to Rome had, by the beginning of James I's reign, become, among all but the dwindling minority of Catholics, part of patriotism itself. Smithfield fires, Armada galleons, and to crown it all, the sensational horror of the Gunpowder Plot—such were the reaction stimuli that anything remotely associated with Rome would henceforth excite in the mind of the average John Bull. He would spot the hidden hand of the Jesuit behind every proceeding that was less than a hundred per cent Protestant, and to enter into human relations with Spaniards or any other Catholics would be to sell the pass to Satan.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

That ugly but useful new word, ideology, exactly expresses the nature of the germ that England had got into her system, in the course of what had been a purely patriotic struggle against foreign dictation. It is idle to speculate whether she had first taken the infection from returning exiles from Mary's persecution, or in the course of her military association with the Dutch. It had certainly begun to rage like a fever in her blood at the time of the peace, and was to go on with mounting temperature and finally delirium to the crisis of the civil war.

Such spiritual fevers are not necessarily to be deplored. Their effect may be in the long run to purge and fortify the constitution. Never did country more need a course of stiffening concentration than Elizabethan England, whose magnificent energies were being dissipated in every field from war to literature, for the lack of it. This lack the Puritan discipline was exactly calculated to supply.

It is just a question of when, and to what extent, it becomes too much of a good thing. Whether, for example, the iconoclastic purging of a Church may not add to its dignity by stripping it of all manner of tawdry ornament, or whether it may go so far as to convert it from a thing of beauty into a gaunt and colourless skeleton.

It was the crown of the cumulative misfortune that overwhelmed the House of Stuart that they should have been pitchforked into the government of a nation in which this Puritan drive was just beginning to gather its terrible and subversive strength. It was fatal to them in so subtle a way, as it would have taken almost impossible penetration to have grasped at the time. For their natural instinct was to run the business of the nation in what, to their more than average intelligences, appeared to be the nation's own best advantage. It might, for instance, suit England's book better to revert to her old policy of friendly co-operation with Spain, than to fight her, at ruinous expense, in order to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for her more dangerous and completely unsentimental rivals, the Calvinist burghers of Holland. But

AN ESSAY IN DICTATORSHIP

England was so far advanced in her ideological fever as to identify her own interests with those of what Mr. Belloc has happily christened the Geneva International. The Dutch were accordingly white and the Spanish black; the one might wipe out, by massacre and torture, an entire British settlement, and John Bull would put the telescope to his blind eye, whereas the friendliest overtures of the other were part of a diabolical conspiracy. We have seen something not dissimilar in our own day.

And on the same principle the blessed determination to keep England out of the blood bath in Central Europe, even if this involved a good deal of what is sometimes called "weak", and was certainly bloodless, diplomacy, was to incur the guilt of Laodicea.

Now the Stuart administration took a great deal of thought for the interests of England, but for the ideology of Geneva, rather less than none. It would have been a little unreasonable to expect a monarch to enthuse, to any marked extent, for revolutionary extremism, least of all one who had known by bitter experience what a Hell a Calvinist Kirk was capable of raising round the throne. It was only human nature for him and his son to accept with joy the *via media* of the Anglican compromise, and endeavour—for they were devout men and expert theologians—to make the Church of England no longer a political convenience, but fully expressive of its civilization in the spiritual aspect.

That was to defy the Geneva, or, as it came to be known in England, the Puritan movement, to mortal combat. For to capture the Church, and effectively Calvinize it, was a Puritan objective that had defined itself as early as Elizabeth's day. And the fact that King Charles, with the aid of his all too dynamic little Archbishop Laud, was determined not only to retain, but to accentuate, the outward and visible adornment of national religion, was proof positive, in the eyes of the Elect, of collusion with Rome. Never was accusation more

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

flagrantly libellous in its literal implication. But there was a deeper sense in which it came not far short of the truth. For the Church of England was organized and governed on lines that were Roman in everything but the Roman connection.

But it was not only the pursuit of an ideal that gave its impetus to the Puritan drive against the Throne. Not the least powerful factor on the Lord's side was the desire of those, whose fortunes were built up on the proceeds of sacrilege, to remain in undisturbed possession. It was only after the Restoration that Puritanism carried any sort of social stigma ; before that the great *nouveaux riches* who had risen on the crest of the Reformation were almost without exception united in a Platonic affection for the austere principles. Men like Pym, whose private lives bore little resemblance to those of the great ascetics, were veritable zealots in their public capacity, and played the Protestant hand for all it was worth. It was a dangerous game, this of Dives evoking the Djinns of revolution in the hope that, when they had done their allotted task for him, they would return quietly to their place of confinement. Dangerous or not, nothing less would suffice to turn the balance against opponents like Strafford and Laud. And once embarked on a course of treason, there is no risk like that of failure.

It was on the Rome-Geneva issue that a decision was at last obtained. So precarious was the position of the Crown without military resources or financial reserves to draw upon, that one single mistake—and particularly a mistake involving war—was bound to be fatal. Archbishop Laud, whose genius had just a tinge of that form of insanity which assumes everything desirable to be practicable, started the avalanche by an attempt to bring the Scottish Kirk into line with the Church of England. As the issue of greased cartridges to a regiment of sepoys was that of an Anglican prayer book to an Edinburgh congregation, and the result was to precipitate a riot. Within two years the riot had become a holy war ;

AN ESSAY IN DICTATORSHIP

within three an invading army was in occupation of English soil and, with the active collusion of the opposition bosses in England, holding up the country to ransom in order to levy blackmail on the Crown. A not wholly disinterested ideology had, for the time, made a signal conquest of patriotism.

So far everything had gone according to programme—the programme, that is to say, of the financial and propertied interests that were the nucleus of the future Whig party. They had the Crown completely at their mercy, and, as we have already seen, they exploited their advantage to such effect as to reduce the Government to abject dependence on the will of what they calculated would be an irremovable majority of their own supporters.

It was just at this moment of their apparent triumph that the situation began to get out of their hands. They had made it impossible for the King to govern, and yet they do not seem to have had any serious intention of taking over the business themselves, even when he wanted them to do so. Their talents had been all for pulling down; when it was a question of building up they began with one accord to make excuse. They could only go on wrecking; hitting and pelting the fallen monarchy, and compassing the complete overthrow of the Church. In what way the business of the country would be conducted when, if ever, the situation was finally stabilized to their liking, they failed to indicate. It is improbable they had formed any particularly clear notions in their own minds.

It was thus that they lost their grip upon that intangible, but very real thing, which we call public opinion. The Englishman, even when worked up to the pitch of greatest excitement, is a conservative at heart. Next to "this is not done", his favourite taboo formula is "this is going too far". The Pym-Hampden combination of extremists was going altogether too far for the ordinary Englishman's liking. Even in the Parliament which had been swept to Westminster on the crest of a revolutionary

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

wave, the majority that they had so cunningly plotted to perpetuate was in danger. A long and violent manifesto or Remonstrance, by which it was hoped to keep monarchophobia on the boil, was only forced through the House by the narrowest majority and at the risk of bloody combat. The reaction had only to gather a little more momentum, to bring a day of terrible reckoning for men who, by all ordinary standards, had plunged their hands deep in treason. It was fortunate indeed for them that they had debarred the King from appealing, at this crisis, to the country.

But they had still the initiative, and still—which was their one chance—the means of forcing him from his waiting, and winning, game into taking action even more shocking than their own to public opinion. Let him once believe that his Queen, who, as a Catholic, was condemned in advance, was marked down as their next victim, and his heart might get the better of his head. He might feel himself impelled to snatch at the fruit before it was ripe—to get his blow in first. The result was the overwhelming fiasco of his attempt to arrest the Opposition chiefs in the sacred precincts of the House, on a charge of which they were manifestly guilty.

It was human but suicidal, changing, at a stroke, a winning cause to a losing one. The swing of the pendulum was violently checked. The last rags of constitutional decency were stripped from the revolution ; war on the King in his realm was openly levied, and the Parliamentary leaders can have had little doubt of bringing him quickly to heel. But from this point all calculations began to go wrong ; for just the very thing happened on which neither side could have reckoned. Instead of the quick decision at which each had aimed, the war dragged on for nearly four years without any decision at all. The King could not win, because no one has ever won an English, or British, civil war with London against him ; but the great superiority in material resources at the command of the plutocratic ring lacked the moral impetus

AN ESSAY IN DICTATORSHIP

capable of smashing the undisciplined, but enthusiastic and excellently staffed forces that, contrary to all expectation, took the field

For God ! for the cause ! for the Church ! for the laws !
For Charles King of England, and Rupert of the Rhine !¹

War, if there is nothing else to be said for it, provides, as by fire, the most searching of all tests. It unmasks the hidden forces that lie beneath the social surface, until that which is strongest potentially is brought into decisive play. Now at this particular crisis in the development of England, the strongest potential force was undoubtedly that of the Geneva ideology which, though it was already past its maximum of strength on the Continent, had just about attained it in England. All that was needed to make it irresistible was a man of sufficient genius to exploit it. Such a man was that rather uncouth, middle-aged squire from Huntingdonshire who, pitchforked for political reasons into a military command, not only won the war but showed himself one of the greatest trainers of troops, and perhaps the greatest of all cavalry commanders the world has seen—Oliver Cromwell.

Before the war he had never been a soldier, but he had made himself conspicuous, and a little absurd, as a Puritan zealot. That is to say, his zeal had been a devouring passion, and not, as with his Parliamentary leaders, kept well in hand as a means to a political end. But that particular sort of zeal happened to be the decisive factor in the war, and because Cromwell embodied it to start with, he understood how to evoke and concentrate it. What if he had no experience of discipline ? In his very bones he had the most effective system of discipline ever devised, that of Calvinism. He had merely to adapt it to the special requirements of the mobile arm, that still, as in the days of Hannibal and Scipio, decided the fate of battles. And being a very representative Englishman,

¹ This magnificent statement by Macaulay of the cavalier case, is about the finest instance, since Balaam, of inspiration conquering prejudice.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

he yoked his spiritual enthusiasm to a very material practicality ; one could trust in God all the more confidently on a basis of dry powder and sound tactics.

Cromwell's perfect simplicity of vision, joined to the energy of genius, translated into literal fact the wish dream of Calvinist faith. He formed a company of the elect who, under the patronage of the Lord of Hosts, not only believed themselves but did actually turn out to constitute an irresistible force, capable of going through anything opposed to it, without losing its cohesion or power of decisive manœuvre. The side that had Cromwell's Ironsides had thus the winning card in its hand every time. And once this had been established at Marston Moor, it was only a natural sequel to standardize the training of the whole Parliamentary Army on the new, or Cromwellian model, thus creating as formidable a military instrument, having regard to its numbers and the conditions of its time, as was ever put into the field. It was never beaten—it never appeared to be beatable.

The irruption of this new factor into English history caused a situation to develop for which there was no precedent and which was never to be repeated. For the outcome of the Civil War, unforeseen by either party to the original dispute, was to evoke the ideal conditions, so far as any English conditions could be ideal, for a military and—as we should now call it—a Totalitarian dictatorship. It was the old story of the battle of frogs and mice, with the New Model in the part of the owls.

The Proto-Whig plutocracy, the kingdom of King Pym, had allied itself with the Geneva ideology to its own undoing. Its army had blossomed into another sort of kingdom, that of Christ Militant on earth. It was no mere blood and iron machine, responsive to civilian control ; it was more than capable of reasoning why and, on due occasion, of making reply. It knew what it wanted or—what amounted to the same thing—what the Lord wanted ; and if this were denied, it would take it in the name and strength of Jehovah.

AN ESSAY IN DICTATORSHIP

Within a few months of the Parliamentary victory and the King's surrender, the politicians at Westminster, with the King in their hands and the property of his followers at their disposal, felt that the time had come to disband their army, and that this could be most economically accomplished by bilking it of its arrears of pay. In their fraudulent simplicity they had forgotten, or counted on their poor buff-coats forgetting, that an unbeatable army has only to remain in being to have the country at its mercy. But the army had not forgotten, and the civilian bluff was called Parliament, or what remained of it, proved to be as abjectly at its mercy as the King; it could do nothing but talk, and that only until it pleased the military leaders to put an end to its prating. The "company of poor, ignorant men", as Cromwell had called it, had come into a sovereignty more absolute than that of any King or Parliament. What it willed, went, for the sufficient reason that it was capable of smashing any conceivable opposition.

If it is an exaggeration to say that England woke up, one fine morning in the latter part of 1647, to find herself under a military dictatorship, that is only because the English mind is notoriously slow to adapt itself to any revolutionary change. But that was precisely what had occurred, and the only question—about the most momentous on English record—was what the army, and what the country, were going to do about it.

It is only in recent years that we have been in a position to understand in what way the new dictators proposed to answer it. That army—more of a nation in miniature—proceeded to resolve itself into a religious, and political, debating society. The records of some of these debates, at headquarters, have survived, thanks to the shorthand notes of a happily inspired secretary, and they display the almost unique spectacle of Englishmen of all classes, from the acting Commander-in-Chief to the humblest private, exploring those first and abstract principles

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

that all good Englishmen, as a rule, are content to keep decently even out of their own sight.

So far had triumphant ideology prevailed even over the inborn practicality of these very John Bullish individuals. For they were, most of them, in a state of strange exaltation. God, the fierce old storm God of Mount Sinai, was palpably in the midst of them. Even when practical Cromwell was pleading the greatest urgency, they would hold up proceedings for the purpose of prayer, as if it were possible to connect their minds on to some direct current of inspiration. Most of them had no doubt of being able to build up England again from its foundations by canons of divine architecture.

The out and out revolutionaries, or levellers, were pleading for a complete democracy based on the abstract right of "the poorest he that is in England" to have a voice in choosing those who make the laws for him to live and, it might well be, to lose his life under. For these soldiers were capable of regarding themselves in the light of citizens, and citizens of no earthly city. Their value was proportionate to their status in the Kingdom of Heaven, on which the kingdoms of this earth should be modelled.

Against this was the trained legal intelligence of Cromwell's nephew, Ireton, pleading for those existing, and concrete, rights which had been what all champions of English liberties, from Magna Charta onwards, had laboured to preserve. "Divine law extends not to particular things"; property is the fundamental part of the Constitution—take away that and you take all: and Cromwell, the most representative Englishman of them all, contemptuous of theory and only anxious to get some practicable working compromise into operation with a minimum of palaver and delay.

And since, whatever their aspirations, England held them by the force of spiritual gravity, it was Cromwell's way that prevailed. Or, if we are to put it with perfect accuracy, we may say Cromwell's lack of any foreseen way whatever. For, if ever man revealed his own secret,

AN ESSAY IN DICTATORSHIP

it is he, when he blurts out that a man never rises so high as when he does not know where he is going. For that, if we follow his course, with all its sudden changes of direction, we shall find to be the one principle to which he was perfectly consistent. He neither knew where he was going nor cared to know, provided he could keep going. The next step is enough ; the task in hand, done with one's might, sufficed for the day. God, the good old God of dictators, can be trusted to equate might with right.

Here, at any rate, was a new and unique phenomenon in English history—a Sovereign, like those of the Continent, with irresistible military force to implement his will. For when Cromwell, with drawn sword, had quelled an incipient mutiny and showed the extremists of the New Model who was going to be master, he had armed himself with such sovereignty to the fullest degree. A few years, and he would have the King butchered, Parliament turned out of doors, and not only England, but the whole of the British Isles, bludgeoned into a submission that, so long as his life lasted, there was no hope of challenging in arms. All that remained for him was to turn that proved and matchless efficiency of his to the task of getting the country prosperously and contentedly governed. It was his utter failure to do anything of the sort that broke his heart, and brought him down with sorrow to a grave, in which a disillusioned England would not allow even his bones to rest in honour.

Here was the gospel of force and dictatorship, the gospel of which Thomas Carlyle was to be the British evangelist, tried out under the most favourable possible conditions by one whom Carlyle, with perfect justice, from his own standpoint, saluted with the title "Hero as King"—tried out and found wanting for as long as England should remain England.

And to have put that matter to the decisive test will perhaps be found, on a final taking of accounts, to be the greatest service that Cromwell rendered to his countrymen. For the most tragic feature of his career is that he

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

was no Continental doctrinaire, but an Englishman of Englishmen, humorous, tolerant, and, apart from that demonic urge for over-riding all opposition in the Lord's name, quite the most sensible man of his time. Certainly, if he could not succeed, no one else would stand a chance. It was just that common sense of his that made him on every occasion want to cut the cackle—cackle of monarchy, cackle of Parliament, cackle of the law courts—and get to work. It was his property, he frankly admitted, always to be making haste; let him once decide on a thing, and he would go for it bull-headed. "We will cut off his head with the crown on it" . . . "Not what they like but what is good for them!" . . . such were the cries with which he brought his sword crashing down through every Gordian knot tied by Mr. Legality and Mr. Civility. His supreme blasphemy against the Constitution is conveyed in his Rabelaisian rendering of the phrase *Magna Charta*.

But it was *Magna Charta*, and all that *Magna Charta* had come to imply, that defeated him. Whether or not he was conscious of it, he was a beaten man from the moment he had achieved his supreme, symbolic triumph of force over law in the slaughter of his King. That tongue-tied, greatly misunderstood gentleman, whose life had been one long story of frustration and defeat, was enabled in the last week of his life to win back all, and more than all, that he had lost. Whatever he may or may not have been before, he was able to stand forth in sight of his people, who were powerless to save him, as the champion of that law and those liberties that were the very breath of their national existence. With unerring insight, King Charles perceived the fatal disadvantage at which his enemies had put themselves by wrenching the sword out of the hand of Justice. It enabled him to have the law on them. With a reasonableness that was all the more effective from its gentle dignity, he compelled them to come out into the open in precisely the character in which they had thought to expose him, that of "tyrants,

AN ESSAY IN DICTATORSHIP

traitors, murderers, and enemies to the good people of this country". Charles the Tyrant, the Man of Blood of Roundhead propaganda, was converted by one stroke of the axe into a martyr for the people, a disembodied spirit incomparably more potent than Charles Stuart had ever been in the flesh. A regicide government, or governor, would henceforth have nothing but physical force to rely on—and physical force is never an argument that will be accepted as final by the English people.

But King Charles was not the only person capable of pillorying the new regime in the eyes of the nation. There was a pugnacious and cross-grained Londoner called John Lilburne, a type that only England could possibly produce, who spent the whole of his time in asserting his right to something or other against anyone he could find to dispute it, and preferably—for he was no ignoble disputant—against the most powerful personage or highest authority in the land. To Lilburne, the legal works of old Justice Coke were something more than a Bible; he had them at his finger-tips, and what he did not know about fighting his own case was not worth knowing. He had fought Star Chamber, and the experience of being flogged at the cart's tail had only stimulated him. He was a past master in the new art of demagogic journalism, and all the leagued forces of the State, though they could shut him up physically, could no more stop him from producing pamphlets than you can stop a conjuror from producing rabbits out of a hat.

The point about Lilburne is not that such a man existed, but that England is the one country where he could conceivably have existed and got away with it. They would have a short way with such as him in a Totalitarian state to-day; they would have known, even in his own time, how to deal with him on the Continent; but in England he proved permanently and triumphantly irrepressible. He defied Parliament as he had defied Majesty; he defied the judges before whom he was

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

arraigned for treason, and twelve good men and true had sustained him in that defiance. Even after Parliament had taken the last awful expedient of passing a special Act to banish him under penalty of death, he came back and defied the Lord Protector, Cromwell himself. He had the whole of London by this time on his side—

“ And what, shall honest John Lilburne die ? ”

What was even more significant, he had the army itself cheering and blowing trumpets when the inevitable jury pronounced him innocent. Poor Cromwell, at his wit's end, was positively driven to another of his defiances of the law by keeping Lilburne under restraint. Almost pathetically he offered to release him if he would only promise to live quietly and refrain from constituting himself public nuisance in chief, but honest John gave him clearly to understand that he would know no way of liberty but that of the law—and litigation.

Cromwell, in all his glory, could indeed beat down physical opposition—from first to last there was no question of opposing him in arms—but of moral foundation he had none. The spirit of Coke on Littleton, of Magna Charta and the Constitution, was stronger than he. He tried to govern by Parliament, and his Parliaments would no more allow the government to be carried on than those of King Charles. He tried to go all out for force, and govern the country by martial law. He had to drop it—the experiment was too palpably against the national grain.

There was only one thing could save him from the disaster that was plainly impending—he could turn his face to the wall and die. For his dictatorship was both morally and financially bankrupt. The burden of his great standing army, with its appertaining taxation, could no longer be sustained except by methods of naked tyranny—and yet that army was the one thing that stood between him and the quartering block. His brilliant foreign policy, which had humbled the pride of Spain in

AN ESSAY IN DICTATORSHIP

the dust and made the name of England feared throughout Europe and North Africa, had landed him hopelessly in debt. He got no thanks for it—all over the country they were beginning to wonder when this nightmare of his rule would come to an end, and His lawful Majesty, and the Law, enjoy their own again.

On the Continent it would be the merest matter of course for a King to announce that the State was summed up in his own person. But for Cromwell, such an announcement would have been a blasphemous absurdity. His own army would not have stood him in the formal capacity of King ; nor did he himself, with all his belief in force, seriously contemplate going for a naked and unqualified dictatorship. All the English blood in his veins impelled him to give his rule at least that veneer of constitutional decency, of which his own proceedings had stripped it.

It was fortunate indeed for mankind that he died when he did, and before he had taken the one last desperate way that offered a respite from his difficulties. He had still his irresistible army ; he had proved its quality on the Dunes at Gravelines against the best troops the Continent could produce ; he had got his jumping off place, a second Calais, in Dunkirk . . . a crusade would rally behind him all the Protestant and patriotic sentiment of England. Another Agincourt and who knows whether even a Parliament might not have been found to see him through ! Given the sort of man Cromwell was, and the strait he was in, the thing not only might, but must, have been tried. It would have been the policy of the Hundred Years' War repeated in even more hopeless circumstances. And the repercussions on English development would have been almost inconceivably disastrous.

As it was, the result of the great experiment was to advance that development to a very perceptible degree. It was a very different England that rang its bells for a restored monarchy from that which had been shaped by the fostering care of Elizabeth and the two great Cecils.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

And the love of England had taken part in the same process of change—patriotism itself may have lost something of its morning freshness, but it had acquired a new depth and content. Or rather, perhaps, it had begun to realize something of that which was implied by the greatest of all Elizabethan patriots in that phrase about England resting true to herself.

Because, even by a process of bloody trial and error, she was coming to realize that she stood for something of more value than her own power or material prosperity. England was a spirit ; she had not cut herself off from the Continent in the mere wantonness of insularity, but because she was pregnant with that which she needed isolation to bring to birth. She hardly knew yet what it was. She had looked for it in Calvinism, but it was not there. But when she began to make a legend of Magna Charta and her ancient liberties it was into the future that her mind's eye was straining. She was becoming dimly, but surely, conscious of her destiny.

CHAPTER VI

BRITAIN DEFINES HER INDEPENDENCE

While England had been passing through her fever of civil war, the leadership of European civilization had changed, and the dark-browed Spaniard, with his solemn and self-torturing religiosity, had gone down before his cousin of France, with his lighter touch upon life, his nimble-wittedness and fastidiousness of taste. The wiggid man of the new age was, essentially and avowedly, an artificial product, turned out to a French specification. It is inevitable that we should talk in European terms of an age of Louis XIV, and think of its sequel under the titles of Regency, Louis Quinze, and Louis Seize. The magnificent palace that was put up at Versailles, with its accommodation for 10,000 souls, was as the tabernacle of a sun-king, with all the monarchies of Europe for his satellites.

This French character of European civilization was the mark even of those nations that put up the strongest resistance to the political ascendancy of France. For in a polite and aristocratic age, culture counted for more than politics, and more, even, than religion. It was nevertheless the grand purpose of Louis XIV to turn the domination of influence into one of arms, and his kingdom into the nearest approach he could make it to a European Empire.

For the spirit of Rome had never ceased to inform the body of European civilization. Always there was this gravitation towards unity, always a tendency to regard these scattered sovereignties as destined to come together under the *imperium* of a Cæsar, just as the feudal lordships of France had pooled their independence and pride in this great, centralizing power of the Versailles

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

monarchy. For the way of France was consciously and deliberately that of Rome ; the form, both of her visible and her invisible empire, was classic. Those pictures of Louis XIV, in the garb of a Cæsar and surrounded by Olympian deities, crossing the Rhine, have a very definite and profound significance.

Always the spirit of Cæsar has walked abroad in Europe, even during the modern age, and always, during that age, there has been the countervailing influence of England, to prevent it from resuming its old dominion.

For now, following on the Restoration, English, or Anglo-Saxon, history enters on a new phase. The island civilization had declared and maintained its independence of Europe ; it was becoming conscious of its own purpose and individuality ; it had now to define its relationship to the larger unity from which it had broken free. For though England had ceased to be dominated by Europe, it was impossible for her to exist in isolation from it. To every Continental influence she could not fail to react, through her whole being ; and now more and more palpably her civilization was beginning to act on that of Europe. And, indeed, if she were to have the chance of surviving at all, she must needs give in proportion as she received ; even action and reaction must be mutual.

For it came to this : England, for her life, could not afford to allow Europe to fall under the domination of another Cæsar. Such a contingency must be fought against to the last drop of her blood, to the uttermost farthing of her treasure. She dared not leave the Continent alone. She must preserve it, if not as a family, then as an anarchy of independent sovereignties. Its unity on a basis of freedom was a notion that she had yet to conceive, and an example to set, in her own Commonwealth of Nations. But its unity by any sort of compulsion would be the death sentence on her own freedom—that was the stark fact that stared her in the face. And this is what is meant when we talk of the Balance of Power as the steady principle of her European policy.

BRITAIN DEFINES HER INDEPENDENCE

We must not imagine that the great formal secession of the Protestant peoples from a united Christendom had been the death of the Roman idea in Europe, or fatal to the prospects of a European Empire. In some ways, those prospects had even been increased, since they were no longer bound up with the waning spiritual *imperium* of the Pontiffs. The Reformation might well have cleared the way to the power of a Cæsar who would conquer by the temporal sword ; and from the time of Luther down to our own, the menace of such a power has never ceased to impend over Europe. Sometimes it has been palpable and imminent, at others masked or in abeyance, but always it has been there ; always there has been a candidate for Cæsardom, gathering or deploying or launching his forces ; and always, sooner or later, England has awoken to the fact that it is for her to unite and rally all the scattered powers of European resistance.

She had appeared in this role against Philip of Spain, though in the subsequent struggle against the Hapsburg axis in Central Europe she had prudently elected to stand aside, and allow other powers, France and Sweden, to throw in all the weight that was needed to preserve the balance. It would have been better still if Cromwell had had the wisdom to persevere in this masterly abstention, instead of proving so obtuse to the signs of the times as to weigh down that balance still more in favour of the potential Cæsar, by backing the rising power of France against moribund Spain. But Cromwell was still obsessed by the Protestant ideology that saw in the Spaniard, as he himself put it, the great enemy of England, "naturally so . . . by reason of the enmity that is in him against whatever is of God."

But now, this sort of language has come to have a strangely out of date ring. God and His alleged preferences have ceased to count, except with a rapidly diminishing minority of ideological back numbers. We are in an age whose motives are based on exact calculations

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

of interest, more often than not of the most sordid and personal kind. The Balance of Power is a notion as congruous to its way of thinking as that of the infinitesimal calculus and the Newtonian law of gravity.

We see England then, in this new French phase of European civilization, as having a fully independent and yet intimately associated civilization of her own to mature. To a superficial observer, the independence may be open to question ; the leaders of her polite society seem to pride themselves on nothing so much as their French appearance and manners. When Marshal Tallard gives his sword at Blenheim to the Duke of Marlborough, it is as if two courtiers of Versailles, as like as tailors and wig-makers can turn them out, are competing in civilities that have become as elaborate a drill as any taught by their sergeants ; two members of the same society, bound together by a freemasonry that goes far deeper than the international rivalries which they are briefed to prosecute in arms.

And yet these are but appearances, as superficial as the wigs themselves. More and more beneath the French veneer, England is beginning to find her own soul, to progress towards ideals that are gradually beginning to define themselves. In the eighteenth century this difference begins to be appreciated even in France ; there is at times a rage for copying the English way—an Anglomania as it is called.

Moreover, from the Restoration onward, England's associations have ceased to be exclusively European. She is beginning to turn her back on the Continent, to plant the seeds of her development in another Hemisphere. She has come late into the race for overseas territory but already she is beginning to be drawn into a way of her own, which is not that of other empires, or indeed of any empire. Her colonies along the North American coast represent less an expansion of power than of soul. The island civilization is feeling the urge to become world-wide ; it is becoming too big a thing for one small

BRITAIN DEFINES HER INDEPENDENCE

island to hold. That aspect of the case will be long in making itself apparent even to the English consciousness. Ideas of empire are too deeply ingrained for anything else to be conceivable ; colonies are possessions, and good for what they can be made to fetch in military strength or commercial prosperity. It will take a dire and bitter lesson, and more even than that, to bring home to John Bull the possibility of *libertas* without *imperium* as the principle of expansion.

Meanwhile, the strong hand of Cromwell had for the first time fashioned an effective working model of the British Isles united under one sovereignty. Hell or Connaught was, indeed, worse than no solution of the eternal Irish problem, and the Curse of Cromwell, in that land of undying memories, was destined to act as a perpetual inhibition on any closing of accounts with England. But the cleavage of Civil War had, strangely enough, gone a long way towards uniting Great Britain. England and Scotland had got into the habit of thinking not in terms of rival nations, but of conflicting ideologies. Englishmen and Scotsmen had fought with or against each other as Presbyterian or Royalist ; the Blue Bonnets had come over the border to support an English Parliament, or to bring back a British King to Whitehall. Never again would there be the old cat and dog relationship. Scottish nationalism was still very much alive, and would never be killed—but its fulfilment in a wider union was at least within the prospect of statesmanlike endeavour. It might be that here the English ideal of liberty would have its first chance of vindicating itself internationally.

So then we see this youngest of civilizations in process of transition from semi-insular to insular, and from insular to worldwide ; and coming more and more to the stage at which it can compete, on a footing of equality, with that of the Continent. But England herself, the nucleus of this new world order, what has *she* come to stand for? What is the idea behind it all, the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

something different that makes her independence worth asserting ?

These are questions that few Englishmen, in the latter part of the seventeenth century, would have been capable of answering. In the high triumph of Puritanism it had seemed plain enough, to men like Cromwell and Milton, that England's special mission was to stand forth before the world as the inspired champion of the Protestant cause, "even to the reforming of Reformation itself." But under the auspices of the Merry Monarch, such language would have been too remote from life to have been even funny. The connection with the Geneva International was finally severed ; the good old cause had gone to the scaffold with the regicides.

But because the extremists on one side had been put down, it did not mean that those on the other had got in the saddle and would ride the nation. The noisy and bloody debate of the Civil War had, in fact, resulted in a patched-up compromise that had left the whole issue of who should be effective Sovereign of the country, still to be decided. In outward form, the old Tudor monarchy had been triumphantly re-established, but with this important difference, that outside the Church, all the extra supports it had borrowed from the principle of Roman Law were knocked away, and Parliament, from being, in principle, summoned to "order and settle" the national business on occasions of special emergency, had now established itself as a continuously active, if not a senior partner, in the State, meeting year by year as a matter of normal routine, and capable at any time of putting irresistible pressure on the Crown.

But what was Parliament ? To understand this is to know who had really won the Civil War. For that struggle, long before it had closed, had got as completely out of the control of the original combatants as that of the legendary frogs and mice. Plutocrats like Hampden and his associates had never bargained to pull down the King in order to put the Major-Generals and the Saints of God in

BRITAIN DEFINES HER INDEPENDENCE

control. Never again would they let loose the fires of Puritan zeal to burn up their own houses. Never again would they allow the keystone, in the shape of the monarchy, to be knocked out of the social arch. They had far more in common with the Cavalier gentlemen with whom they had originally crossed swords, than with the grim horsemen whose very commanders were frequently not gentlemen at all, but who had made their social superiors as stubble to their swords. There is a freemasonry of Mammon ; wealth calls to wealth. Whatever differences there might henceforth be between different sections of the landed and mercantile plutocracy, there was this in common between them, that the existing social order was to be preserved and strengthened by all means, and that the way of a republic, or of revolution by force of arms, was from henceforth barred. There must never again be another dictatorship, or another army in control.

So much at least had been settled for good by the collapse of the Puritan experiment. But there was another question, the answer to which could not even have been predicted with any certainty. Was the plutocratic Parliament, according to the original plan of the Pym-Hampden combination, also to control the monarchy ? or was it to be the other way about, and the monarchy, instead of being the puppet of Parliament, itself to pull the wires on which the politicians danced, until, by luck and good management, Parliament could be induced to abandon its own share in the sovereignty ?

That was one of those eventualities that, since it never did occur, we are apt to assume was never on the cards. But at the time of the Restoration, the odds might have seemed decidedly in its favour. For the monarchy had come back to its own with a prestige immeasurably increased. The martyrdom of a King in front of his own palace had made an impression hardly less profound than had that, centuries earlier, of an Archbishop before the altar of his own cathedral. The ostensible fruit of rebellion

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

had been the military tyranny that had become like a memory of Hell to the average Englishman. Never had such a passion of loyalty possessed the country, and it was not only heartfelt, but calculated to last, since the State Church, with its reinforced strength and its monopoly of propaganda, was committed to its unqualified support. Again and again, in the course of her subsequent history, it was proved to demonstration that the worship of royalty was an instinct planted deep in the soul of England, and that it only needed a plausible object upon which to fasten. A Sovereign who knew his business might command enough popularity to defeat almost any conceivable combination of political forces that could be marshalled against him ; for, as the cavalier bard had sung,

“Loyalty is still the same
Whether it win or lose the game.”

But there was one proviso that even Royalty must observe—whether it won or lost, it must play the game. Or, which is the same thing in English, it must avoid doing those things that are not done, as the Tudors had known, by intuition, how to avoid them. Which things, at the Restoration, boiled themselves down to two or three quite simple and fairly obvious prohibitions. His Majesty must never, in demeanour or policy, approve himself anything less than a hundred per cent patriot, in the crudest sense ; whatever means, fair or foul, he might take for getting his own way, must be kept within the strict but elastic letter of the law ; and, in the matter of religion, though an Anglican, he must never cease to be a Protestant. To these might now be added an obsessive horror of military rule, and therefore of any regular force fit to be called an army—a fleet was a different proposition—which again meant as complete as possible a withdrawal from European politics.

Now it was the supreme bad luck of the monarchy that the accident of hereditary succession should have thrown up a series of Sovereigns who, because they could

BRITAIN DEFINES HER INDEPENDENCE

not, or would not, conform to these conditions, accomplished what no treason could have done in frustrating the loyalty of their subjects. It required a perversity almost superhuman to drive the Church into league with rebellion, and yet even that feat did not prove to be beyond the royal capacity.

If, instead of a King who was half French by birth and wholly a Catholic at heart—in so far as he had either heart or faith—another Tudor had come back to enjoy his own, he might only too probably have played a winning hand in the long game of King versus Parliament. As it was, Charles II, despite his more than suspected willingness to sell the pass to Rome, had so far triumphed at the time of his death, that he could afford, with a certain amount of financial help from his Most Christian cousin Louis, to carry on, in defiance of the law, without any Parliament at all and with the support of a public opinion overwhelmingly in his favour. Had his manner of life allowed him to live it out to the normal term, he would have stood every apparent chance of driving his advantage home and consolidating it on Continental principles.

What even he could not have provided against was sheer suicidal lunacy on the part of his successor. James II is as much the despair of whitewashers in our own day as he was that of loyalists in his own, at any rate, in so far as his reign is concerned. No man ever, in the course of three brief years, displayed a greater genius for engineering his own destruction; few have gone more out of their way to make themselves hated, or thrown up the sponge so ignominiously. And yet the amazing and tragic thing is that his previous career, as Duke of York, shows us an utterly different sort of man, a veritable father of the British navy, as tirelessly efficient in his office work as he was fearless on his quarter deck—and, indeed, his name deserves to be inscribed prominently on the roll of Admirals-in-Chief from de Burgh to Jellicoe. It is a skein too complicated to be unravelled here, but I

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

would at least suggest an explanation of the difference between the earlier and later James, in some effect of that terrible experience he had of being driven into exile from his country's service, and almost deprived of his birthright to the throne, on account of his faith. Something must have snapped in his nature, or perhaps one of those subtle glandular changes of which science is only just becoming aware may have upset his mental balance. Certainly his conduct after that time does not seem to have been that of a completely sane man.

But whatever may have been the reason, there can be no doubt that in an incredibly short time he succeeded in dealing the cause of monarchy such a blow as no Cromwell or Shaftesbury could ever have struck. Only a few years before, the country had been stampeded into wild panic at the mere rumour, propagated by perjury, of a Popish plot, with James as chief villain. Now such a plot was flaunted, in the light of open day, with a recklessness on which the Pope himself tried, in vain, to put a brake. But the royal missionary had reached that stage of delusion, wellknown to alienists, that is only conscious of its own wish dreams, and to which the outside world, and the limitations it imposes, have practically ceased to exist.

No one but the King himself could by any possibility have defeated that loyalty to his throne to which the faith of his clergy and the honour of so many of his subjects were unconditionally pledged. But they were Englishmen, and, unlike James, qualified even their most sacred principles with a tacit "so far as practicable". For, as Lord Palmerston once put it, there are limits to all things.

None the less, James was faced with a dilemma that might have taxed the statesmanship of the ablest monarch. For no patriot King—and James, with all his faults, was in his way as true a patriot as when he had broken the Dutch line at Sole Bay—could resign himself to the veto that a practically unanimous public opinion imposed on

BRITAIN DEFINES HER INDEPENDENCE

the bare idea of a royal army. That veto was very far from being an unreasoning prejudice ; the sense of political reality that seems innate in the English mind was fully alive to the danger involved in putting a sword into the hand of the King, with which, like his brothers on the Continent, he might make his sovereignty absolute. And yet with Louis XIV more and more plainly determined to dominate Europe by a technique of aggression, and with a vast and unbeatable army at his disposal, it seemed madness to rest content with a mere handful of trained soldiers not fit to be called an army at all.

Here was a dilemma indeed, but not of the sort to trouble King James. In his state of mind, to want a thing was to go for it bull-headed. He would not only have his army, but he would, without any disguise whatever, enlist it in the service of his now open conspiracy to reclaim England for Rome. He would officer it with Catholics ; he would hold it like a pistol at the head of London. Moreover, with the true madman's cunning, he would paralyse any opposition there might be, by an edict of toleration—in flat defiance of the law—that would enable him to play off a Calvinist-Catholic bloc against the ultra-loyal Church of England. And this, at a time when the whole of Protestant Europe was seething with indignation at the anti-Protestant pogroms organized by His Most Christian Majesty, which were driving hordes of refugees to take shelter in England !

What James accomplished by this transparent manoeuvre was not the Romanization of England but—what was almost as great a miracle—the de-Romanization of her Church. He had positively bludgeoned his clergy out of their cult of his Divine Person, and forgetful of his father's maxim, "No Bishop, no king," he actually went to the length of haling seven of these bewildered champions of non-resistance to the dock, and forcing them to stand up against him for their rights, under the protection of a Common Law jury. The fact that after

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

even this all but one of them were prepared to sacrifice their careers and benefices rather than abjure their allegiance, only brings into clearer relief the way in which the whole original purpose of a State Church had been stultified. The bottom was fairly knocked out of non-resistance, and though the Tory Party still continued to include a High Church plank in its platform, the Church as an independent force had almost ceased to count. The happy state of things in the eighteenth century, in which the rectory was a genteel appanage of the mansion and the see a fatly manured bed in which those planted by influence might vegetate, was one consequence of the Revolution.

That crowning fiasco of the Bishops' trial had made it plain to the whole nation that its King had become impossible, and the only question was how to dispose of him without starting another social avalanche like that of the Great Rebellion. This time there must be no question of the rich, governing class allowing the situation to slip out of its control. It had learnt its lesson, and fate had provided, in the person of the half-English William of Orange, an occupant for the Throne whose succession could be made to combine the advantages of strong leadership in the European crisis, with a dictated settlement of the long contest for sovereignty at home.

For William happened to provide an instance of that rare phenomenon, the good European. His unlovable, but not ignoble, nature was concentrated on the one end of delivering Europe from the tyranny of Louis XIV, and England, like Holland, was no more to him than a piece on his European chessboard. Provided that he could play her in the common cause, he was perfectly content to let her politicians run her domestic affairs in their own way.

The arrangement, on both sides, was one of pure convenience, without the faintest tincture of sentiment. William was not a King, in the old-fashioned sense of

BRITAIN DEFINES HER INDEPENDENCE

being hedged with either divinity or affection, but a business manager, with strictly limited powers, of what was coming to be more and more a commercial organization. His services were rewarded with a nagging ingratitude such as few managers of ordinary businesses would be prepared to stomach, but such petty annoyances were all in his long day's work for Europe, and as for England, the only way in which she could hurt him was when it came to her disbanding her own army in the face of the enemy. But though, for a moment, he did seriously think of shaking her dust off his feet, his patience remained proof even against that trial.

The victory of his cause he would never live to see, but that of the politicians on the home front was decisive and irreversible. The primary and obvious aspect of the revolution that some have called glorious, was that the control of the country had passed from a king to a class. Ever since the days of Stephen's "devils and wicked men", the King had been supposed to stand above class, and see fair play for the bottom dog by imposing his own and the nation's peace upon all such as might aspire to tyrannize over their fellow subjects. That was what Charles I had meant in claiming to die a martyr of the people.

Now there was an end to all that. The top dogs of society had at long last established themselves in possession of the State machine, and ran it through a select, ministerial committee theoretically nominated by the King, but really forced upon him by whatever faction happened to be in control of Parliament. By what stages this arrangement came to be perpetuated in the form of cabinet government is a matter with which we are not concerned here ; it was in any case the only possible outcome of the Revolution.

That is the primary and obvious aspect of the Revolution ; the substitution of class for national government, or to be perfectly fair, of a government that ought to have been national, but under the later Stuarts had betrayed

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

its trust. Disraeli summed up the new settlement in a phrase—Venetian Oligarchy.

Oligarchy it certainly was, up to a point, but Venetian—in the sense that Disraeli had intended to convey—it was not. There had been no John Doe and Richard Roe by the lagoons. There, the most potent, grave, and reverend signors, who had monopolized power and privilege, had taken no thought for anyone's rights and liberties but their own; they were the State, whose will was its law. But in England whatever oligarchy there was in the working of the Constitution was in no way essential to it. And this, though on a superficial view it might seem to be the last word in English cant, is a distinction of vital importance. That which is not grafted on to the tree must sooner or later fall away and die.

When William had arrived in London, he had received the nonagenarian Serjeant Maynard with the remark that he must have survived all the lawyers of his standing.

"Yes, Sir," had been the old man's reply, "and but for Your Highness, I should have survived the laws too."

That is the profoundest apology capable of being offered for the Revolution. The law, the Common Law of England, had survived, and not only survived but triumphed. Never again would there be the least question of its being over-ridden, or even seriously challenged. Neither directly nor insidiously would the great rival system, that of Rome, trench upon its authority in the realm of England. By the end of William's reign, the Act of Settlement had constituted the Lawyers' Guild an independent power in the State, by a clause making its heads, the judges, to all intents and purposes irremovable.

It was the weightiest of these judges, Blackstone, who when the "Venetian Oligarchy" was at its height, could, with authority, define the rights or liberties of Englishmen as consisting in the free enjoyment of personal

BRITAIN DEFINES HER INDEPENDENCE

security, of personal liberty, and of private property, and "so long," he adds, "as these remain inviolate, the subject is perfectly free." In consideration of which Blackstone is proud to cite the opinion of that great French author, Montesquieu, "who hath not scrupled to profess, even in the bosom of his native country, that the English is the only nation in the world where political or civil liberty is the direct end of its Constitution." Which draws forth from Blackstone the patriotic ejaculation, "*Esto perpetua!*"

I have said that among the most important things in history are those that might have happened and failed to do so. I might have added those that have come about, not through the foresight and contrivance of any individual, but by a sort of overmastering necessity, or as one might say, popular intuition. For even to the few survivors who still cling to the Victorian Whig tradition, it must be hard indeed to work up any enthusiasm about the personalities of such Englishmen as played the leading parts in this momentous drama. There is none of the high, heroic note that ennobles the tragedy of the Great Rebellion. Never was there a more unrelieved record of treachery and sordid intrigue. It may be a small thing, but it gives the atmosphere of the time—the way in which the new Government not only let loose that most infamous of all recorded criminals, Titus Oates, but actually dived their hands into the tax-payer's pocket in order to reward the fellow's services with a pension. Or we might instance the way in which so many of the Revolution Fathers did not hesitate to reinsure themselves by treasonable correspondence with the deposed King, so that defenders of the great Marlborough's conduct in betraying a British expedition to the enemy have to do so on the ground that he was not double-crossing his new, but treble-crossing his old, master.

Could any grapes, one asks, have sprouted on such black and crooked thorns? And the answer, the amazing answer must be "Yes, and of the richest vintage". No

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

change of standpoint can minimize the significance of such achievements as those of religious toleration, of the freedom of the Press, of the humanization of political trials, and of the masterly contrivance by which a regular army was brought under the control of Parliament in the Mutiny Act—all that crop of enlightened and fruitful legislation that the most malicious ingenuity cannot associate with the selfishness of class, and that was destined to endure and develop long after the “Venetian Oligarchy” was dead and damned.

Above all, we have to credit the Revolution, and the principles that inspired it, with that noblest and most beneficent sequel, of a free union, by mutual consent, of England and Scotland, not as two kingdoms whose King happens to be the same, but on a basis of common patriotism and common freedom, expressed in the same Parliamentary way of government, though with an agreement to diverge in the ways of law. And this without leaving the faintest tinge of bitterness on either side, or anything that could become the seed of a national inferiority complex. It was the first successful experiment in that technique of free association that has been made perfect in the Commonwealth of Nations. And how great a miracle it was we may realize when we turn to the spectacle of Ireland, well and truly conquered and governed on imperial principles as the lesser by the superior breed, until England had succeeded in establishing a chronic and implacable enemy on her flank, to the unspeakable detriment of both alike.

When we think of the long, cynical oppression and corruption of the oligarchy that the Revolution established in power, and of the unparalleled degradation of politics during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, we can only marvel at the way in which, amid the almost universal falsity of her leaders, England preserved her truth to her own soul and destiny, and was so signally glorified by the least glorious episode in the whole of her history.

CHAPTER VII

MARKING TIME

However fashions may change in regarding the aristocratic heyday of the eighteenth century, there is one feature of it that stands out beyond the shadow of dispute. It was in England a time of patriotism, naked and unashamed. It was on everybody's lips, and so far as words can be relied on, welled up from everyone's heart. Its advertisement in and out of season had become so binding a convention that the most Bullish of all contemporary patriots could define patriotism as being the last resort of a scoundrel. He might have said that it was the resort of everybody, scoundrels included. In the society of Bible Christians, any competent devil will quote scripture.

England had passed the stage at which she had been fain to work out her insular independence in fear and trembling. Since she had taken her great and perilous decision to strike out her own line of civilization, she had not only shattered the great Catholic crusade to bring her back to the fold, but had taken the lead in the European counter-offensive against the power of Louis XIV, until that latest candidate for Cæsardom had been beaten almost to his knees—and certainly no Englishman was likely to consider too curiously the proportion of his countrymen who actually participated in those resounding victories of the Duke of Marlborough. Was not Corporal John an Englishman, and were not his victories their victories?

Gone now was that superb humility that had wrung from Elizabeth herself the ejaculation that England's deliverance was the Lord's doing, and marvellous in her eyes. Since the not particularly glorious, but none the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

less decisive, Anglo-Dutch naval victory of La Hogue, under the eyes of the unfortunate James II, the invasion of England had ceased to be a menace worth taking seriously. Long before there had been any question of beating the French armies in the field, the British navy had established its command not only of the British, but even of the ancient Roman sea, and the end of the war saw Britain firmly established as a Mediterranean Power with ideally sited bases at Gibraltar and Minorca.

Now she was beginning to realize, and exploit, the strategic advantage of her insularity. By playing her hand in the way taught her by William of Orange, she could force a Continental opponent—which, for well-nigh a century and a half would mean France—to exhaust his resources in defending or expanding his land frontiers, while she could concentrate whatever proportion of hers she chose upon overseas objectives, to which her Dutch sovereign had been indifferent, but to which the new patriotism was becoming keenly alive.

How thoroughly she had learnt the lesson appeared when, instead of going forward with her allies to drive home Marlborough's victories against Louis XIV, she coolly went behind their backs to conclude a separate peace, in which she gathered up every trick that she had secured for herself as a maritime and trading power, and left them to continue the game as best they might for the original, and ostensible, European objectives of the alliance. It was a masterpiece of sharp practice, since France had by this time been hammered out of any possibility of disturbing the balance for at least a generation. And whatever its motive or method, its effect was to end the wretchedness of a war wickedly prolonged, with about as fair and lasting a settlement as any that could have been devised in the cause of civilization.

This Peace of Utrecht confirmed John Bull in the excellent conceit he had already acquired of himself, and determined the form of his self-chosen destiny. He had quite ceased to bother about any sort of ideology. There

MARKING TIME

was no more talk of Christ's Kingdom on Earth or the reforming of reformation itself; he was frankly out for everything he could get or grab; all was gain that could be entered to the credit side of a cash balance, even the monopoly of the slave trade with Spanish America, which was not the least prized of his pickings at Utrecht.

Never was epoch so frankly and shamelessly material as that which covers the reigns of the first two Georges, those unattractive and unrespected foreigners who had been dumped down on the throne by way of a political convenience. Pudding time is the epithet that exactly hits it off. We can see it, we can almost smell it, through the medium of Hogarth, in all its grossness and cruelty, its squalor and lust—vital abundance pressed down and overflowing.

Dominant over its most exuberant and most material phase, during the 'twenties and 'thirties, is the mountainous figure of Sir Robert Walpole, ruler and representative of England as few of her kings have been, as hard-headed a financier as he was a typical Norfolk squire; a man with no more delicacy than Falstaff, but—as the English saying goes—with no nonsense about him; under whose peace, as under that of Henry VII, the country thrived and prospered beyond measure.

There was a perfect boom in patriotism, such a roaring, frothing self-glorification as only a nation safe and eupeptic can afford to indulge in. "A patriot, Sir," Walpole was once moved to exclaim, "why, patriots spring up like mushrooms. It is but refusing to grant an unreasonable and insolent demand, and up starts a patriot!" Some of the forms in which this now universal sentiment expresses itself are of a crudeness almost unbelievable. For though the materialism of the time was prohibitive of inspiration, poetry and rhetoric were in demand and had to be pumped up somehow, and we find even so distinguished a bard as Edward Young, of the *Night Thoughts*, blossoming forth in a full dress ode

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

to British Trade and Navigation, coupled with the name of George I, in which mermaids sing, Tritons blow, stars roll, winds breathe, and natives, from pole to pole, bound, in the sublime assurance that "to Britain all belong". Trade is elevated to the status of a tenth Muse, and not only invited to bless Britain, whose noblest theme she is, but reminded, with commendable frankness, that she pays the poet's song. Still, this patriotism beneath wigs did manage to produce one or two songs that were worth paying for. It is the time of *Rule Britannia* and *God Save the King*, of *Hearts of Oak* and *The Roast Beef of Old England*. They at least leave us in no doubt of what the average Englishman meant by loving his country, and what he loved her for. He was even more sea-power conscious than he was trade conscious. He believed that Britannia, by ruling the waves and making them the highway for her trade, had attained a standard of material well-being that made her the envy of Europe. From Hogarth downwards, Englishmen were never tired of contrasting their roast beef, and general beefiness, with the lanthorn jaws and croaking guts of cadaverous Frenchmen who, one would almost be led to believe, subsisted entirely on frogs.

But that was not all. John Bull, even in the lowest depth of his materialism, had something nobler to boast of than the size of his belly. Britannia did not stop short at ruling the waves, but went on to stipulate that her sons should, even though slavers, never be slaves, and this meant a great deal more than mere freedom from foreign conquest :

The nations, not so blest as thee,
Must in their turn to tyrants fall ;
But thou shalt flourish great and free,
The pride and envy of them all.

Nor was the boast without some foundation in fact. England had kept her ancient liberties, and even developed them, while those of her Continental rivals

MARKING TIME

had one by one fallen before the sovereignty of absolute, if benevolent, despots, or closed oligarchies.

It is only too easy to judge eighteenth century England by the standards of twentieth century democracy—which is after all in direct line of descent from the old Whig cult of liberty. But our judgment will be fairer if we base it on evidence available there and then, and in the light of what only too easily might have come about if things had gone a little differently in the past—if, for instance, one of the many Catholic plots against Elizabeth's life, or the success of the Armada, had put an orthodox Sovereign, supported by Spanish arms, on the throne of England ; if Strafford and Charles I had made a success of Thorough ; or if Charles II had lived another decade to consolidate his apparently complete triumph over the Constitution.

There was even a passing danger lest the Whigs themselves should have repeated Pym's treason to the Constitution by prolonging indefinitely the life of the Whig House of Commons elected in the first blush of the Hanoverian succession, and at the same time perpetuating their control of the Upper Chamber, by limiting the King's prerogative of creating peers, but this proved too much against the grain of the Constitution to materialize.

The cult of liberty and roast beef was no result of oligarchic propaganda. The free-born Englishman, aggressively conscious of his freedom, was by no means confined to the upper ranks of society. Indeed, the bearing of draymen, bargees, labourers, and other sons of the people towards their social superiors would appear to have been marked by a brutal arrogance that would be unbelievable nowadays. Even the domestic servants, if we may trust Defoe's account of them, not to speak of Swift's, would appear to have been almost as much of a terror as a help to their employers. A "damn you, get out of my way" attitude seems to have been the commonest form of intercourse between strangers of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

different, and not uncommonly of the same, classes. There was something, in fact, supposed to be specially, and creditably, English about it, one of those many characteristics that distinguished the beef- from the frog-fed breed. For the combined result of freedom and roast beef had been to give the average Englishman, in his own estimation, if not a monopoly of European manliness, at least a double or multiple proportion to the share of anyone else.

It is not easy for us to understand how any poor man of that time can have talked of freedom ; or any rich one, for that matter, without his tongue in his cheek. We know only too well from such intimate records as have come down to us, as well from the beginnings of English fiction, what gross and manifold oppression there could be in practice ; what chance a poor man had of maintaining his right, or a poor girl her virtue, against some plutocratic or titled magnate who had gone all out to ruin either. The pull that money or influence conferred in a time of universal venality was apt to prove overwhelming.

But then, we must remember that to the mind of the contemporary Englishman the vital thing was to preserve intact the form and principle of his liberties, without inquiring too curiously how the system might work out in practice. And this was because he was practical enough to adapt himself to what one can only describe as the enormous untidiness of the social order. We, who have become habituated to a mechanized and standardized regularity, find it almost impossible to realize a state of things in which so much was done, as Kipling might have put it, rather more or less. The laws of the time were like its main roads—often in such disrepair that it was easier to drive a parallel course through the neighbouring fields. Provided the roads were there, this kind of thing could be borne.

Voltaire tells the story of the typical Thames boatman who, perceiving that the philosopher was a Frenchman,

MARKING TIME

bawled at him, in the richest Billingsgate, that he would rather be a boatman on the Thames than an archbishop in France. Only the next day, if we may believe Voltaire, he found the same man in prison, and in irons, begging charity from the passers-by, and cursing the Government, one of whose press gangs had seized him for active service in a King's ship away from his wife and children. Men were taken from their families in the last war, and will be in the next, to worse horrors than any that Voltaire's boatman was likely to encounter, without its occurring to them even to curse the system that disposes of them, body and soul, like hogs in a Chicago meat factory. The eighteenth century was as fatalistic about irregularities as the twentieth about rules—such is the difference of standpoint of a pre-machine from a machine age. It is unlikely that the boatman's mates were at all shaken by this incident—or a hundred such—out of their conceit of being free born Englishmen.

And this freedom of our fathers, if it lost above the line of comparison with our own, scored at least as much below it. During the early Hanoverian times, when there was no regular police system, and when the fear of a standing army was still obsessive, the mob was a power in the land capable of imposing very definite limits on that of the State. The London mob in particular, that had been taught its power by King Pym and had terrorized the Crown itself into surrender, was as formidable as ever in the days of Walpole, whom it had compelled, at the height of his power, to drop an excise scheme calculated to interfere with the great national industry of smuggling. It came to this, that wherever two or three determined ruffians were gathered together, there was a nucleus of resistance to constituted authority that might tax its utmost resources to overcome, even on such rare occasions as it elected to accept the challenge.

The state of things, for example, on such parts of the coast as the Romney marshes might have been fairly described as one of guerilla war levied by "owlers",

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

or "poor honest men", who carried on a traffic in free imports in defiance of the protectionist policy sanctioned by Parliament. That father of descriptive journalists, Defoe, writing in 1724, describes how riding along this part of the coast, he would encounter parties of dragoons, like huntsmen beating up game, and how, according to his information, these same dragoons were time and again set on in the night, and obliged, under peril of their lives, to allow free passage to the illicit convoy. There were grimmer happenings; customs' officers and informers done to death, sometimes with tortures worthy of Red Indians—one peculiarly shocking case of this taking place in Sussex in 1748. And though the gang in question was duly brought to book, not the least notable feature of the proceedings was the imposing display of force at the Lewes assizes—so necessary was it considered to vindicate the power of the State to prevail in the last resort.

The power of the mob was then, so long as it lasted, a very present bulwark of liberty, but such liberty as was apt to be a cloak for worse than lasciviousness. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the ruffianism, the swinishness, and the ignorance that informed its ebullitions, especially after the introduction of gin had quenched whatever glimmerings of decency it might otherwise have evinced. It is not to be wondered at that in 1753 it should have been caught by that perennial and malignant mass affection called anti-Semitism—the slogan being "No Jews, no wooden shoes!" as if there were some sinister connection between Jews and Frenchmen. And that was respectable compared with the frankly criminal motives of the ordinary riot.

It is only fair to the mob to say that the grossness of the age pervaded all ranks of society, Walpole himself being as coarse of fibre as he was shrewd of brain, with bawdry as his favourite conversational recipe, on the characteristically sensible ground that it was the topic least calculated to give offence in a miscellaneously

MARKING TIME

assorted company. Gargantuan appetites and night-long potations were almost a matter of course with those who could afford them, and many a country squire differed little in accent or taste from his peasantry. It was only an elect and privileged minority who, having obtained a grounding abroad in French manners and standards of culture, acted as a civilized leaven to the upper class at home.

It is a time on which it is difficult to look back with either pride or pleasure. There no doubt comes a point at which materialism itself may be justified by its fruits, and the long peace maintained by Walpole has a certain common-sense grandeur. A man who was not too proud, but too sensible, to fight, even when the Spaniards started besieging Gibraltar, and who could glory in the reflection that 50,000 Europeans had been killed in a year of war about the Polish Succession, but not one Englishman, ennobles himself and his age. But the age did not want to be ennobled in that particular way. It was not enough for John Bull to wax fat—he must also be kicking, and preferably someone with pockets to rifle and incapable of kicking back. The rich and decrepit power of Spain provided an ideal victim for the purpose, and opposition propaganda was not long in working up the required fever of patriotism. Walpole was stampeded into war as he had been stampeded out of the excise, by the effective voice of the people, and for the next nine years Britain was involved in a scrambling, indecisive squabble, in which most of the Continent became involved in varying combinations, and out of which she might just as well have kept, for any glory or profit there was to be won.

Historians of a certain school will never tire of unravelling the threads of the very complicated and very dirty game that determined the course of what, for want of a more appropriate word, may be called the national policy after Walpole had been successfully removed from the helm. Here we need only remark on the blessed

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

security of an island civilization that could, without openly disastrous consequences, allow itself to be run by whatever crooked or incompetent amateurs could job themselves into command. The nation must be secure indeed that can survive having its affairs at the mercy of such a figure of fun as the Whig Duke of Newcastle whom, but for the redeeming fact that his corruption was for everyone's pocket but his own, Dryden's cap would have fitted even better than its original recipient :

“ Every inch that is not fool is rogue.”

As it was, there appears to have been an almost universal agreement on the part of those who, in the ancient Chinese phrase, would have been classed as “ superior men ”, that there was something very rotten about the state of England at this time. Even the author of *Rule Britannia* has some quite different things to say about his goddess, to the effect that she has grown an empty form, that her soul is eaten up by corruption and her sons degenerate. Nor is this a solitary instance, for practically every poet of the time, who has the least pretensions to inspiration, writes about his country in a strain worthy of the prophet Jeremiah. Nothing, according to the veteran Pope, is sacred now—in the last days of the Walpole regime—but villainy ; Young, whom we have already met as the rhapsodist of commerce and empire is, on maturer vision, capable of seeing Heaven's half-bared arm of vengeance waving over a doomed Britain ; while Doctor Mark Akenside, a poet of no small reputation in his own day, is convinced that every noble thought that once animated Britons is buried in luxury and avarice. The testimony of the philosophers only confirms that of the poets. Berkeley had proclaimed the impending ruin of Britain through luxury, perjury, vice, gambling, and unbelief, at the very beginning of the Walpole era, and it apparently continued to impend at the turn of the century, to judge by the equally gloomy diagnosis

MARKING TIME

of another philosopher, David Hartley, who looked upon the world and discovered it to be in the most critical state ever known. And to crown it all there appeared, on the very eve of Britain's most victorious war, Brown's "inestimable estimate", as Cowper called it, quite a best seller of its time, as any book is calculated to be with an English public, that proclaims, in sufficiently vivid terms, a national bankruptcy of religion, honour, and public spirit.

It is easy to laugh at all this, but one cannot help suspecting that there must have been some foundation for so singular a consensus of gloom about the spiritual condition of the age, in those who would appear to have possessed the pick of its brains; that the evils they denounced were by no means imaginary, nor perhaps the dangers they forboded so illusory as they appear to us in the light of the event. It is probable that any person of ordinary sensibility will find that the closer he looks at early Georgian England, the more difficult he will find it to like what he sees.

But it is not a question of personal tastes, still less of moral inhibitions. We are in a position to take longer views than those of contemporaries, and to realize that life and growth may be as strong in the bare tree as the green. And that is the thing that most mattered about England—despite all that was corrupt and all that was base, despite the setting of party above national, and personal above all other considerations, despite the proved insufficiency of her leaders and the brutality of her populace, she had lost nothing essential of her heritage; her vital continuity was unbroken—she went on growing.

There would appear to be something in her nature that makes it possible for her to endure personal or class ascendancy without sacrificing anything essential. The oligarchs of the eighteenth, like the monarchs of the sixteenth, century, were able, and content, to get their own way in practice, without making a principle of it. Like those monarchs, they might juggle with the law,

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

but never to the extent of setting themselves above it. It was, no doubt, because they were practical English folk, that they let sleeping principles lie.

It was, perhaps, a not wholly unmixed evil that the controls of her state machinery should have been in such amateur hands as those of the Whig bosses who shared out the ministerial posts after the fall of Walpole. There was little harm to be done by slackness, compared with what might have been the result of efficiency. An upper class capable of pursuing its own selfish ends with logical ruthlessness, might very easily have consolidated its rule into a real Venetian oligarchy, a class tyranny uncurbed by law and backed by such force as nothing short of revolution from below would be capable of breaking.

Whereas no very obvious harm could be done, in the middle of the eighteenth century, by letting things drift either at home or abroad. It was slack tide in the affairs of Europe; the Balance of European Power was not immediately threatened by any of the ponderous dynasts who played their game of intrigue and war for carefully limited stakes. It would have taken superhuman penetration to have seen a dire portent in the irruption, upon this leisurely scene, of a potentate of a very different order, a ruthless militarist with no pomp or trappings about him, and exploiting his heritage of the best trained army in Europe with a concentrated determination to seize all of his neighbours' property that might, by any means, be seizable. But that the rise of Prussia could have constituted, even in the remote future, any sort of threat to England, stood not within the prospect of belief. Sufficient for the day . . .

War itself could, as far as England was concerned, be allowed to drift on for year after year without seriously disturbing the current of national life. It is true that for one thrilling moment there was the spectacle of kilted clansmen hurrying along the road from Carlisle, and fetching up at Derby, with nothing between them and London but King George standing at bay on Finchley

MARKING TIME

Heath ; but the people on the route had lined up to enjoy the free show, and the Highlanders departed as rapidly and bloodlessly as they had come. There was King George wandering off into Central Europe at the head of a miscellaneous army, and then hacking his way out of what ought to have been a pro-French Sedan ; there were grand manœuvres in the grand manner on the Flemish plains, with commanders in the field waiving the honour of first volley ¹ ; naval engagements in which the commanders thought, and were expected to think, more of preserving a faultless alignment than of destroying the enemy ; and a long leisurely Congress, to draft a peace at which everybody politely handed back his winnings—with the ominous exception of Frederick Hohenzollern.

What did it matter one way or the other whether the leadership was incompetent or the administration corrupt ? Except, perhaps, for common soldiers dying like flies in tropic seas of Yellow Jack, or poor old Chelsea pensioners sent to feed the sharks *en route* for the Pacific—but it was an untidy age, and did not bother about its loose ends.

It was the same at home ; things could be allowed to drift with more impunity than would be the case nowadays. No doubt of the law, and the whole social system, being biased in favour of property, but it had more of chaos than organized tyranny. There is no period whose record one is so tempted to falsify by generalization, whereas, if anything does emerge, when it is studied in detail, it is the extraordinary scope of individual variation. There was the Hell Fire club at one end of the scale, and Lady Huntingdon's Connexion at the other. The owner of one estate might be as impeccable as Fielding's Allworthy, and of the next as illiterate a boor as his Western. Tradesmen blossomed into county magnates ;

¹ Or if that good old story be questioned, take that of the Prince of Orange withdrawing 2,000 men, at the height of a campaign, to parade at a christening.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

scions of the proudest families were apprenticed to tradesmen. There were parsons who neglected their duties and justices who abused their powers to an extent that would be inconceivable nowadays, but there were men all over the country who were doing sound, but unsensational, work in both of these capacities ; scarcely a parish but had its list of benefactors to the poor, of which the records often remain to this day, and there were philanthropists on an heroic scale like Colston of Bristol and Coram of the Foundling Hospital.

Certainly what struck contemporaries about England, in comparison with other countries, was not class, or any other form of tyranny, but rather the reverse. The intellectuals of the Continent may have had a chequered opinion of British culture, but they were agreed in looking to the British Constitution as a veritable shrine of liberty. And if we compare British with Continental conditions, we can hardly blame them. In practically every other country the noblesse was a privileged caste ; the gentleman, by birth, was a being of superior clay, with his status strictly defined, and a lofty contempt for the *canaille* without the pale. Whereas in England there was no such thing as a gentleman, except in the esoteric lore of the Heralds' College, or in so far as anyone was a gentleman who could get himself accepted as such by his friends and neighbours. If you had a handle to your name, that was like an entailed estate, and did not, as in France, ennoble the blood of any of your descendants except the one who inherited it. But even so, it did not put him in any way above the law, or disentitle him to the services of Jack Ketch, on due occasion. Not the least notable item in the long pageant of English liberty is the spectacle of Earl Ferrers being driven, in his crested coach and six—so much at least being conceded to the title—from Newgate to Tyburn, there to pay the penalty of having pistolled a certain low fellow, his own steward—so much being conceded to the law, and more also, since his noble body was turned over to the surgeons to

MARKING TIME

dissect like that of any common highwayman ! Imagine such a thing happening to a *comte* or a *duc*—before the guillotine began to make up for arrears ! For the Common Law, if a respecter of property, was none of persons.

We shall utterly misunderstand the time if we insist on treating the homage paid, as a matter of course, by the all-powerful Whig rulers of early Georgian England, to liberty and Revolution principles, as mere oligarchic eyewash. They were no more insincere than any other collection of average human beings, who have the instinct of reconciling their principles to their interests. Certainly after the great code of reforming laws passed after King William's accession, they were not minded to do anything positive in the way of increasing liberty still further. But—and this is the important point—neither did they go about to suppress it, not even when they monopolized the power of sovereignty in a way that no sovereign had done. Perhaps their abstention indicated no very difficult virtue. Things as they were suited them well enough, these unimaginative sons of a prose age ; and the squire, living all the year long among his own people, hunting his hounds, farming his fields, and gathering in his rents, would have been sorry indeed to have changed his condition for the courtly servitude and ennui of his opposite number in France, doomed to spend all but a month or two of the year in whatever great palace barrack the King might choose to reside in.

Where one is living to one's own complete satisfaction, it is easy to let live ; but the fact remains that there was a tacit agreement, among the British upper class, in the day of its supremacy, to honour that great British commandment, " It is not done," and that this taboo covered what *was* done in France and Germany and Spain and, in fact, almost everywhere that mattered in Continental Europe.

It is not that on points of detail there was no effort to increase still further the protection already lavished by the law on the rights of property. Penalties of the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

most ferocious severity were constantly being added to the statute book for the smallest infractions of the Eighth Commandment. But here at least things worked out better in practice than on paper. That guardian of liberties, the British jury, took a hand in the game, and saved many a poor fellow from the rope by making it a practice, whatever the evidence, to assess the value of a theft at a farthing below the capital limit of £2 ; nor need even a verdict of guilty amount to more than giving the judge power to end the career of an incorrigible bad character, if he thought fit to do so on the strength of his lost horse or sheep. It was an untidy and a tough-gutted age, and a pitiful case now and then was no shock to its complacency, but the idea of holocausts of pathetic victims is sentimental nonsense. The contents of the Tyburn cart can only exceptionally have deserved or even claimed more sympathy than is the Christian due even of the least deserving.

There is one main indictment that will certainly be brought against the oligarchy, that of the wholesale enclosure of common lands by Act of Parliament that, though the bulk of it took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century, in considerable parts of the country had been accomplished as far back as the sixteenth. Here is no place to unfold the rights and wrongs of this tremendous question, except to say that the story of a deliberate and cynical share-out by the rich of the possessions of the poor is too bad to be true. The case for an enclosed field system to replace the old, wasteful farming of strips on open common was, from the productive standpoint, irresistible. Scientific farming was hardly less of a passion than sport with the big landowners of the eighteenth century, and of this the old way was prohibitive. The country was on the verge of a vast increase of population ; unless it could revolutionize its agriculture as well as its industry, it would have starved—it was enclosure that beat Napoleon's Continental System. The only real question was how to carry

MARKING TIME

out so revolutionary a change without anyone being the loser by it—a superhuman task in the most favourable circumstances, and one in which something more than a merely formal equity was required if the man without capital was not to be squeezed off the land he could not afford to enclose. It was just that something more which was not forthcoming from wealthy M.P.s—conscientiously as most of them seem to have framed the schemes, according to their lights.

I have a little anticipated matters here in order to show that the most serious count in the indictment against the eighteenth century oligarchy does not imply any breach of continuity with the English tradition, or treason to liberty, in the time-honoured English sense of liberties. Not in their most secret conclaves is there the remotest evidence for believing that the squires dreamed of conspiring against the rights of the people, or of tilting the social balance in their own favour—indignation against the principle of enclosure is more of a twentieth than an eighteenth century product. We must face the fact that never since the sealing of the Great Charter have the liberties of Englishmen excluded the strong man's right, if he could establish it, to *take* liberties. Not what is right, but what is *my* right. . . .

We shall never understand our English, or British, or Commonwealth civilization, if we try to sentimentalize about its development. We must contemplate it in all its ugliness and callousness and smug self-complacency, if we are to understand its strength, or fathom the secret of its diuturnity.

It is at least important to note that, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the insular civilization was beginning to give back to the Continent almost as much as it received, though indeed the gifts were so fundamentally different in kind that they can hardly be weighed against each other. As far as culture, in the widest sense of the word, is concerned, its unquestioned arbitress was still France, its fountain head the court at

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Versailles. Judged by the standard of living established there, England's upper class, and whatever might pass for her intelligentsia, was barbarous in its habits and provincial in its notions, the dull, indigestible lump of it only slightly leavened by an elect minority of those who, having had the advantage of a Continental finishing to their education, were at least tolerably good imitations of the authentic model; such Frenchified Britons as Lord Chesterfield and Horace Walpole, such urbane cosmopolitans as the philosopher Hume and the historian Gibbon.

The leaders of the great French Enlightenment, as the intellectual revolution was called that opened the way for the political one, men like Voltaire and Diderot, were European figures, courted by Sovereigns and hardly less powerful. But the Great Cham of the English literary world, Doctor Johnson, was no more of a power, and even less of a name on the Continent, than the actual Grand Cham. Nor would such an uncouth old monster, if he had been known, have been taken much more seriously than a cannibal king dressed up in the trappings of civilization.

But this very French Enlightenment was to no small extent a product of English influence, and conscious of the debt. If the French mind, for which a word ought to be invented several degrees stronger than "insularity", was obtuse to British culture—and to Voltaire even Shakespeare was a drunken barbarian—to British scientific and political thought it was very much alive. There was no lack of appreciation for the genius of Sir Isaac Newton, a genius characteristically English in being so entirely practical, though on a cosmic scale. Such mathematical giants as the French Descartes and the German Leibnitz had not stopped short at applying algebra to geometry or inventing the calculus; they had gone on to construct epochal systems of philosophy; Newton, who also invented the calculus, applied it to determining the motions of the heavenly bodies, and

MARKING TIME

having thus brought the universe out of darkness into light, switched over his genius to the problems arising out of his new job, the mastership of the Mint. But his nearest approach to metaphysics was an attempt to interpret the prophecies of Daniel not markedly inferior to modern assaults on the Great Pyramid.

Nevertheless, the English practical genius exercised a decisive stimulus on the French mind ; that most pedestrian of all philosophers, John Locke, the apologist of the Whig Revolution, and a veritable apostle of compromise, provided a foundation for systems innocent of any sort of compromise. And the British Constitution, simplified by the French intelligence into the semblance of a most un-English rationality, was held up as a paradise not of liberties, but of a liberty all the more desirable in contrast to a despotism that had ceased to be even successful. Anglomania, which was at its height in Paris when the two countries were at death grips in the Seven Years' War, and extended even to the fashions, was paving the way for a very different sort of revolution from that of 1688.

CHAPTER VIII

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

All through the early Georgian period we have been in an atmosphere of strange unreality—or shall we say of marking time? The endless permutations and combinations of political intrigue at home; the conferences, the kaleidoscopic groupings, the backstairs diplomacy, even the campaigns of the various European sovereignties—to what do they amount but a vast, tacit conspiracy to spin out time; to postpone vital issues indefinitely? And can we wonder? The deliberately artificial order of society which maintained its upper ranks in such affluence and dignity, was too precious a thing to be disturbed by the violent irruption of reality. And yet abroad, if not in England, there was the foreboding certainty that there would come an end; that even on such delicious play-acting as that for which Versailles was the stage, sooner or later

“The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm.”

Never was any catastrophe more plainly foreseen, by anyone with eyes to look ahead, than that of the French Revolution.

There was no corresponding feeling of “after us the deluge” among the English upper class. Even those numerous prophets of gloom who castigated British degeneracy were more inclined to conclude on what, in modern journalism, would be a note of “wake up England!” But the average squire or business man was making too good a thing out of the *status quo* to doubt that any considerable change would be for the worse. What did rotten boroughs or rotten ministers matter so long as the goods were delivered? And in

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

the most literal sense, goods were being delivered ; the profits of trade were steadily mounting and overflowing into capital which, in its hunger for employment, was stimulating the activities of inventors to provide it with new machinery for its energies.

The points of view in France and England might be altogether different, but the effect was the same. The best way to postpone an evil time or prolong a good one is that of making all fast, and answering any new, intrusive reality that comes knocking at the door with a firm "not at home". And there had already been one or two ominous kicks, delivered with the full force of a Prussian jackboot.

Carlyle was right, in a sense, about his hero, Frederick the Great. In an age of artifice he was a phenomenon of terrifying reality. And yet—so far as it can ever be said of genius—he, or something like him, was bound to materialize. For Germany was driven to sell her soul to Prussianism in the eighteenth as she was to super-Prussianism in the twentieth century, because those already in Hell have nothing to lose by the bargain. The ghastly Thirty Years' War, that had come near to reducing her to a depopulated wilderness, had left her an anarchy of petty tyrannies capable of being exploited indefinitely in the game of European, and particularly French, power politics. The old dreamy, profound, lovable German nature had no power of itself to help itself. Only its exact opposite, only a ruthless and soulless discipline, could weld her to that unity and collective strength that she lacked. The way of blood and iron was indicated—that of the spirit was barred. Germany's case might have been pleaded as one of cruel necessity. But no necessity can make might right, or prevent the seeds of death from coming, in due time, to harvest.

Both in England and on the Continent the turn of the century, or to be precise, the year 1756, ushers in a new era in which the play-acting turns to grim earnest. A war breaks out, in which it is no longer a question of fencing

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

for niggling advantages, but in which vital issues are fought to a decision. In some instinctive way, the crowned heads of the Continent seem to have sensed the presence of a foreign and malignant growth in their system, and to have sunk their own differences in what was almost a crusade against this new technique of the higher ruthlessness.

No call to a crusade was likely to awaken a sympathetic response in England. The overwhelming disparity of force between the Continent and the island on its fringe could only be countered by employing that lesser force to keep the greater divided against itself. Many railing accusations have been levelled by European critics against Britain, and most of them so palpably disingenuous as to raise doubts as to whether any case for the prosecution has a leg to stand upon. But there is such a case, though curiously enough it has never—at least to my knowledge—been explicitly stated. It is this; that England's treason to Europe did not stop short of cutting herself adrift at a moment when such action was fatal to any chance there might have been of preserving a united Christendom; but that ever since, she has not been content to leave Europe alone, but has worked with deadly persistency and success to keep her from ever coming together.

Put that way, the case is based upon irrefutable evidence. And the answer—for there is an answer—is hardly calculated to obtain a verdict from a Continental jury. It is to the effect that British civilization was pregnant with a freedom, upon whose growth to world-wide maturity the hope of human progress might well depend. Once let the thread of that continuity be cut, and the principle of Imperial sovereignty, which had been the heritage of Rome to Europe, would reign unchallenged. Sooner or later a new Roman peace would brood over the world, a peace from which freedom would be finally eliminated. And if, as some believe, freedom is the life of mankind, it is, in the profoundest

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

sense, a life and death matter for mankind to preserve it at all costs. England may have been more right than she knew in following her instinct of self-preservation, even at the cost of a disunited Europe.

But the European was only the negative aspect of her policy. She interfered that she might not be interfered with. So long as she could keep the Nations of Europe in a state of anarchic equilibrium, she was herself free to expand her island into a world-wide civilization. And, with her command of the sea and absence of land frontiers, it was in her power to throw her main energies into this work of expansion, whilst all but a moiety of theirs could be diverted to the maintenance of Continental warfare. Here was a winning advantage, if she had leaders capable of exploiting it.

And even under such absent-minded leadership as that of the Newcastle regime—slacker than ever now that Newcastle's brother and colleague, Henry Pelham, was dead—England had really no choice but to take sides with Frederick the Great against the European coalition. On the face of it, here were three great powers, France, Austria, Russia, with a tail of German auxiliaries, in league to annihilate a small one—the most outrageous tilting of the balance that could be imagined. And to England the enemy of enemies had been, for nigh seventy years, and would be for as long again, a France that not only still threatened to dominate the Continent, but was building up an overseas empire that everywhere blocked the path of British expansion—so obviously, that British and French colonists in America had started the war on their own account, without waiting for that in Europe to begin.

Frederick, then, was a heaven-sent opportunity for drawing out the Bourbon trumps in Germany while Britain took the tricks overseas. It would have taken an almost superhuman, though not quite inconceivable prescience, to have divined a greater ultimate menace in the triumph of Prussia than that of France, or to have

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

foreseen that so ruthlessly efficient a despotism might one day be capable of uniting the whole force of Central Europe, with the slogan, "Germany to-day, the world to-morrow." But no statesman, even supposing such prescience to have been accorded him, could have ignored a very present menace for the sake of one only calculated to materialize in a remote future, and even so, not the only one of its kind. The appearance, during that last war, of Russian troops on the Rhine might have started other trains of reflection. . . .

It is unlikely that the comfortable magnates in control of British policy ever thought of the new war as being less leisurely and decorous an affair than the last. But as luck, or their own incompetence would have it, a sensational and utterly unexpected disaster at the very opening staggered the country quite out of its now indurated complacency. Minorca, one of the two great British Mediterranean bases, was snapped up by a French expedition from Toulon, after being tamely abandoned to its fate by the admiral sent to relieve it. But the French had done more than they bargained for. The blow, so cleverly planted, had turned a genteel sparring match into a fight to a finish. Their opponent scrambled to his feet in a state of ungovernable fury. The first victim of that fury was the Admiral himself, one of the comfortable old school who believed that a game of long bowls, followed by a council of war, constituted the whole duty of a man in his position. A file of marines, and a volley on the quarter-deck of H M.S. *Monarque*, were sufficient demonstration, to all others whom it might concern, that it was not going to be so in future, and neither the justice of the step, nor its tonic effect, were diminished by the fact that Newcastle, and some of his colleagues in the Cabinet, deserved the same fate even more richly. Henceforward, for the duration of the war, British Admirals went for the enemy, through storm and shoal, like devils possessed of devils.

The disparity of force between the two alliances was

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

enormous. By all ordinary calculations the leagued Powers ought to have crushed Frederick like an egg-shell ; especially after his first desperate thrust had ended in bloody defeat, and the Duke of Cumberland, who, being of the Blood Royal, was not amenable to the same treatment as Admiral Byng, had withdrawn the British force that was covering his Western flank. But while their enemies continued to make war in the old, leisurely way, England and Prussia were all out to win, and determined to stick at nothing.

And if Prussia had Frederick to embody her will to victory, England discovered her no less inspired representative in Chatham—to anticipate the title by which the elder Pitt is best known to posterity. Of that amazing being, inconceivable if he had not existed, it is enough to say here that the white heat of genius beneath his theatrical exterior was that of England herself ; that he could express with burning eloquence what in her was as yet inarticulate ; that her people recognized in him the leader they were seeking in the crisis and were determined to have. George II blurted out the exact truth when he accused Chatham of having taught him to look for the sense of his people in another place than the House of Commons.

Here is the outstanding fact of the situation : the man supremely capable of winning the war was forced by popular sentiment upon the King and the politicians, and having got the controls firmly into his hands, proceeded to win it, against Britain's particular enemy, France, with a rapidity and completeness which no one would have believed possible. The intuition of reality that is characteristic of all genius showed Chatham that he had only to direct the nation's forces aright to exploit a winning advantage. His strategy, with its worldwide ramifications, was, in conception, of the simplest : to keep the armies of France, with the minimum expenditure of British force, fully employed on the Continent, thus draining her resources to such an extent that she would be

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

unable to dispute the command of the sea or reinforce her overseas garrisons, on which, one by one, it would therefore be possible to concentrate overwhelming force. And this plan he pursued with such concentrated determination that in three or four years the French Empire overseas had been almost swept off the map.

This Seven Years' War, as it was called, had two results, either of which would have sufficed to rank it among the great, decisive contests of history. It confirmed the emergence of militarist Prussia as a power of the first rank in the centre of the Continent; and from it may be dated the development of Britain into the nucleus of a world civilization. It was an ironical fate that determined that these two protagonists of irreconcilable ideals should each have started by preserving the other for the day in which they would meet—no longer shoulder to shoulder.

What the rise of Prussia meant never was, or ought to have been, in doubt, for never did any power pursue its aim with a more single-hearted consistency from one generation to another. From the days of the old Teutonic knights, masters by force of a helot people in the bleak, Baltic lowlands, her rulers had had one aim, which was to drill their people by sacrifice and subordination into a machine for applying the maximum of power to its human environment. To Prussia force was a religion and the State God. Hers was the self-annihilating valour of the hive or ant-heap. One realm, one folk, one leader, had been her implicit motto long before the days of Frederick. It might have been said that she was imperial Rome, only ten times more so. The other nations of the Continent had practised the power politics of selfishness, but never without some tinge or veneer of idealism. Philip of Spain had, in his gloomy way, been a crusader in the cause of the Catholic faith; Louis XIV sought to be the sun king from whose beams civilization would take life. Neither of them had, in his most unscrupulous mood, pursued power for its own sake and stripped egotism naked of either culture or religion. But this was

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

just what Frederick—in spite of his flute playing and Potsdam intelligentsia—had done in practice, as his father had done before him, and his great-grandfather, the “Great Elector”, before them. To appropriate as much territory, to tyrannize over as many people as possible—that was what Prussia stood for as a German state, and what, as she went on expanding, she would continue to stand for with unwavering consistency.

There was just a moment when it seemed as if this terrible potential menace was destined never to materialize. For the coming of a new King to office had fatally compromised the position of England's great war minister. With George III the long eclipse of monarchy in England had come to an end. It had been through no fault of the English people that they had lived, for nearly half a century, under what was to most intents and purposes a republic, with a crowned figurehead only too conspicuously labelled “Made in Germany”. Only such a combination of circumstances could have defeated their ingrained loyalty. Now they had a young Sovereign who, if his blood and nature were German, was English bred and—in a very un-English style—gloried in the name of Briton. What was more, being a German, he had come to the throne with a very definite theory of his functions. This he owed to the inspiration of old Lord Bolingbroke, who had engineered the last, great triumph of popular Toryism under Anne, and whose acute, but utterly unscrupulous genius had divined the exact tactics to be pursued to bring about a royalist revival. There was to be no question, this time, of the King over-riding the Constitution, governing without Parliament, or suspending the laws. His cue was rather to accept the Constitution, and make the most of what it gave him. The country had no wish to be run by a ring of political bosses of the Newcastle brand. The King was still, by law, in control of the administration; he could, by playing his cards right, resume that control for the Crown with the enthusiastic support of public opinion. Let him run the nation's

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

affairs with a sole eye to its welfare ; let him put the best men in the highest places and damn party considerations ; let him stand forth in the eyes of the whole world as a King who is also a patriot. As for the politicians in Parliament, the Crown had still enough resources at its disposal for it to play them at their own game and beat them.

And here was this Patriot King ready born, a young man of the highest principles, and a sense of duty that was positively obsessive. A man also who, as it proved, had a *flair* not inferior to that of Newcastle himself for the minor tactics of political warfare. The great Whig combination that had run the country for so long deserved not the least sympathy for the way in which they were manœuvred out of the loaves and fishes which they had so long monopolized. But there is, unfortunately, one fatal flaw in the idea of a patriot King. He is there not by merit, but by a purely fortuitous conjunction of spermatozoa, nor is it enough for him merely to get the power of government into his hands, unless, having got it, he is capable of governing well, or at least of getting the right men to govern for him. And it was at this point that George's capabilities came to a dead stop. He had a positive genius for filling the greatest offices with the worst possible men. His mind was of that undeveloped type that functions with extreme efficiency on a low plane, and above that, ceases to function at all.

Chatham would have been the ideal man to have headed such a ministry of national concentration as Bolingbroke had had in mind. But the great war minister, proceeding from triumph to triumph on a proportionately magnificent scale of expenditure, and preparing to add a second war—with Spain—to that with France, was too formidable a proposition for a limited intelligence to cope with. The King shed him sooner even than he did Newcastle, and, having got the sort of Premier he wanted in the dimly respectable Lord Bute, succeeded in getting out of the war, by a separate peace with France, leaving his ally, Frederick, to shift for himself.

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

This, if either George or Bute had been capable of conceiving it, might have been a masterpiece of diplomatic sharp practice, securing England's world power and blocking the way to her potentially most deadly rival, since, by an overwhelming balance of probabilities, England's defection ought to have been the last straw for Frederick—for who could have foreseen that the death of one autocrat and the madness of another would cause Russia to change sides just in the nick of time to save him from collapse? But neither King nor Premier was great, or bad, enough for such a calculation. They were not Machiavellians, but only little men who, playing a little game, almost blundered into winning a great one.

As it was, by letting France off more lightly than she had any reason to expect, they secured for England all that she could digest of Chatham's winnings, and established her in a position of almost terrifying predominance. She had, in a few brief years, blossomed into the greatest empire since Rome—greater far than that of Spain, if we are to think in terms of power and not of treasure, since all of America north of the tropics had become the destined field of British expansion, a vast white man's country waiting for its possessors; and since an English commercial company had had thrust upon it, entirely in its own despite, paramount power over the ancient civilization of India.

As it was, no one, not even Chatham himself, was capable of grasping the significance of this new and unprecedented phenomenon of British world expansion. Least of all could England have been expected to understand that the very completeness of her victory had brought a deadlier peril from within than any from without could have been. It was only thirteen years after the Peace of Paris that the American colonies formally severed connection.

We can see now what great and lamentable blunders precipitated that catastrophe, and it is only too easy

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

for us to condemn the blindness of heart and perverse obstinacy of these eighteenth-century statesmen who lost America for England. But what is really to be wondered at is not that ordinary men should have failed to adjust themselves to circumstances for which no experience could be a guide, but that men should have arisen capable of understanding, if not the whole, so much of this new truth that confronted them, a truth that we ourselves, for all our airs of superiority, are only just beginning to suspect.

For we too go on missing the point, just as they did, every time we open our lips to frame the words "British Empire". There would be no harm in this if we did it consciously as a verbal convenience—as we talk of influenza without any thought of the starry influence. But we have certainly not got it out of our heads that empire means something, and when we say British as we might French, Spanish, Roman, or Assyrian Empire, we are falling into the precise error that our fathers did, and that was the root of all those other errors for which we condemn them.

For this so-called British Empire was, in what we may call the main trunk of its development, not an empire at all, in the sense that these others had been. What imperial features it had were as temporary scaffolding to a building in course of construction, or as the stakes that are planted to prop the growth of young trees. For the British spirit is in flat contradiction to the idea of empire ; the more imperial, the less British.

Now the human mind, confronted with any new phenomenon, is never happy until it has found it a habitation along with others of its kind already familiar. In the eighteenth century the conception of empire was perfectly familiar. Every educated man was steeped in the knowledge of the Roman Empire, and knew well enough about those other three symbolized by Nebuchadnezzar's image. But he did not need to go back to antiquities, when he had empires in being to study and

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

compare. There were French and Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch specimens, all of which had one thing in common with each other, and with every empire that had gone before them—that they *were* empires in fact as well as in name. And this was just where they differed from what was called the British Empire.

French and Spanish colonies were, in fact, what the British were in name, possessions of the Mother country. They did not expect, nor did they desire, to be anything else. Their white inhabitants craved nothing more from their rulers than that they should rule, and they had no more thought of doing it themselves than they would of employing a gardener and digging for him. The instinct was not in their blood. And not a few governors, particularly Spanish, played the part of benevolent despot with conspicuous success. Even the Dutch burghers, who might have been expected to have certain traditions of liberty, were as uncompromising imperialists as any—more so, if possible, for they ran their empire frankly and unsentimentally for all the money they could screw out of it.

Empire was what it always had been since Pharaoh had planted his garrisons in Syria, and Hammurabi had given his laws in the land of the two rivers ; you ruled it, and what you could not rule you either plundered at convenient intervals, like Assyria, or let go altogether, as the Greek cities did their colonies.

But the British Empire in North America was not an empire at all in any hitherto recognized sense. It was no result of planning or conquest ; it had happened. Some of the most important colonies had grown up not because, but in spite of the State. Their Pilgrim founders had crossed the ocean not to extend the British *imperium*, but to get away from it and govern themselves. And all the colonies, even those which, like Virginia, had the most royalist and aristocratic traditions, had a more potent tradition still in their souls, that of the old English Common Law, and Magna Charta, and the Parliamentary

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

way of doing things. They had not the least desire to be ruled by any outsider, benevolent or otherwise, though provided he let them have their own way in practice, they did not greatly bother about his tenancy of Government House. Otherwise they would make his life a burden for him.

All this was going on at an effective time-distance of several months from England. It is a point in favour of the Stuart Kings that they were much in advance of their time in their interest in colonial matters, but few stay-at-home Englishmen, even those in the highest authority, allowed their not particularly vivid imaginations to be stirred by what went on in these uncouth dependencies, a habit that persisted almost into living memory; for even Macaulay's encyclopædic mind seems almost to have forgotten the existence of colonies in William III's time. And so it was only natural to follow the line of least mental resistance, and assume that the British colonies were possessions like those of any other empire, and to be treated accordingly.

And for several generations the system worked, if not without perpetual friction, at least without a complete breakdown. Among other English traditions, the colonials had that of loyalty to the Crown and aversion from revolutionary change—and besides, so long as the far more efficiently organized French Empire was threatening to encircle them by joining up its Mississippi to its Canadian line of fortified ports, the red coat of the British soldier was a more than welcome sight. Moreover, the elaborate system of trade restrictions and preferences, by which, after the Dutch fashion, the Home Government sought to exploit the Empire commercially, did not, on the whole, work out too unfairly for the colonies, especially as any sting could be taken out of it by wholesale smuggling.

But Britain and her American colonies were almost bound to part company sooner or later. It was not only that a number of practically self-governing communities

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

on one side of the ocean were regarded by the statesmen on the other in the light of Crown property, but that where the only lasting bond could be one of affection and sympathy, there was scarcely the least question of any sentimental relationship between mother and daughter nations. Each side was in the partnership solely for what it would fetch. And once the motive of self-interest was withdrawn, there would be no reason whatever for continuing it.

That was exactly what happened, from the colonial point of view, when the French were driven, by force of British arms, out of North America. Britain had played her part so well in securing America for the Americans, that now there was nothing left for her to do but to foot the enormous bill, with the additional liability of maintaining a permanent garrison to protect the colonials against the Red Indians. That was all very well, but where were the fruits of victory, or the profits of Empire to Britain?

Is it any wonder that hard-pressed British statesmen should have looked about for some means of inducing the colonials to take a trifling share of the burden off the shoulders of the British taxpayer? That they should at least have tried to prevent the colonials from stirring up fresh wars by reckless encroachment on the Indian hunting grounds? That they should even have instructed the King's revenue officers to take the existing trade laws seriously, to the extent of enforcing them against smugglers?

It is no good blaming anybody for what was nearly as inevitable a consummation as anything in human affairs can be. Britain and her colonies were separated by the whole breadth of the Atlantic; each had their own grievances and their own standpoint that were unknown and almost unknowable to the other. Only superhuman insight on both sides could have found a way out acceptable to both. With ordinary, well-meaning men, such as most of those principally concerned in fact were,

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

there could have been no other than that of separation. And it is merely idle to blame ministers on one side and "patriots" on the other for being men and not supermen in the hour of trial. The most sensible thing said on the subject was the remark of an "eccentric Englishman" to Josiah Quincy, of Boston :

"Very true. Great Britain has no right to tax you. The ministry know it as well as you, but money must be had somewhere. The situation is strained to the utmost at home." ¹

The extraordinary thing is not that English statesmanship should have failed to get blood out of a stone, but that the English genius should have made it so nearly possible to save the situation. Chatham did happen to qualify about as plausibly for the style of superman as any Englishman in history, and there was one moment when it seemed not inconceivable that he might have won the peace as well as the war. It is true that the ultimate difficulties of the problem were hidden even from him ; the man who had overthrown the French Empire and plucked the feathers of the Spanish, could hardly have avoided regarding himself in the light of empire builder, and refusing to part with the sovereignty or trade rights of Britain. But his intuition was born of a deeper wisdom. When the Americans did, in fact, openly challenge the very sovereignty, rather than contribute their insignificant mite to the expenses of their own deliverance by buying legally stamped paper at a substantially cheaper rate than was charged for it in England, he did not dream of considering the reasonableness or otherwise of such a contribution in itself, but rejoiced that the Britons overseas had resisted any demand whatever to which they had not themselves consented:

Intoxicated as he was with patriotism, he perceived plainly that in this the Americans were standing for something more than power and more than interest, something that was the very soul of England. In one

¹ Quoted by C. H. Van Tyne's *Causes of the War of Independence*, p. 135.

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

of his gigantic similes he proclaimed that America, if she fell, would fall like the strong man ; she would embrace the pillars of the State, and pull down the Constitution along with her. This was to lift the conception of patriotism on to a higher plane than ever before, one on which it was sustained by the more philosophic eloquence of Edmund Burke. Sovereignty, wealth, power of arms, these things were nothing accounted of in comparison with spiritual values. What should a nation give in exchange for its soul ? And what gain could compensate for failure in the truth that she owed to herself, that self that she was just beginning to understand, and whose guiding principle was one of freedom ? " England," as Burke expressed it, " is a nation which still, I hope, respects, and formerly adored, her freedom. The colonists . . . took this bias and direction the moment they parted from your hands. They are, therefore, not only devoted to liberty, but to liberty according to English ideas and on English principles."

England, therefore, in fighting the colonies was fighting herself ; in conquering the colonies she would have killed herself. That was the great and outstanding truth that Chatham and Burke had divined, and in comparison with which all the gains and losses, all even of the rights and wrongs of the struggle, faded into insignificance. That even they had not grasped the full practical implication of the faith that was in them, is a point of minor interest. To comprehend the whole truth, almost and altogether, is given to no man.

But what now can we say was the solution towards which their genius was urging them, of this problem of England and her colonies ? Surely this ; to have jettisoned the whole idea of empire ; to have dropped any claim of possessing, or expectation of obedience from, the colonies ; to have abandoned all trade or navigation laws except such as might have been the product of mutual agreement ; and to have shouldered the cost of winning the last war with as good a grace as possible—

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

which was, after all, what had to be done in the long run, with the addition of another 120 millions expended in the process of losing another. However grasping, and however ungrateful the colonies might have been, the one chance of keeping them was by adopting the principle of a quaint old Puritan sect,

To conquer them by love, come in now ! come in now !

Failing that, it is at least conceivable that Chatham's genius and prestige might have found the means of postponing a direct conflict. But fate, malignant or beneficent, intervened just at the moment when his great opportunity seemed to have come, and when the King, by a process of exhaustion, had given him the free hand he sought as Premier of a non-party ministry, selected by himself. He had hardly got his team together, a combination so heterogeneous as to be entirely dependent on the driving power of his personality, than he was stricken down by a mysterious disease that for more than a year rendered him as good as dead. By the time he had got back his faculties, the Government had become one of blind reaction, and the almost incredible folly had been perpetrated of renewing the challenge to the colonies on the fiscal issue. Henceforth nothing short of a complete surrender could have stopped the drift to civil war. And surrender was a word that George III, who had now come to be the dominating power of his own administration, had not in his vocabulary.

The avalanche, that had thus been started, had soon gathered too much momentum for any human effort to stop it. Events followed a now predetermined sequence. The Boston Tea Party ; King George's instinctive resort to the strong line of a bankrupt policy—"Rebels must be made to obey" ; the first fire lighting up the flame of rebellion all along the Atlantic coast ; the Declaration of Independence ; the few thousand British redcoats marching and fighting in a territory too vast for them to hold ; almost the entire continent of Europe joining in

COLONIAL EMPIRE AND ITS NEMESIS

the war or leagued in armed neutrality against Britain—such a combination of forces as she had never been called to face before, or has since. And the patriot King, an Englishman at least in his refusal to recognize the possibility of defeat, entrusting the control of his navy to that very nasty old nobleman best known to the public as Jemmy Twitcher, and that of his army to one of the few British officers who has ever had to be cashiered for flat disobedience of an order to lead his men against the enemy !

Even so, it took six years and the surrender of two entire armies to convince the King's tame Premier, but not the King, that all was over, and that England must part with the United States, not to speak of a few miscellaneous conquests of previous wars ; because, in the old Hebrew phrase, she knew not the hour of her visitation.

And yet through that loss, she had gone far towards finding herself. Just as the Hundred Years' War had been needed to purge her of her first crude ambition to found a Continental empire, so the memory of this American setback was for a warning that an overseas empire—in the sense in which that word had always hitherto been taken—was something fundamentally un-British. To rule the nations with his sway had been for the Roman the supreme purpose in life ; for the Englishman it had begun to fall under the shadow of the great national taboo " It is not done ". Not, at any rate, except in so far as it might have to be done in the cause of ultimate freedom.

It was a warning that would take a long time to sink to the bottom of the national consciousness. For generations there would be found Englishmen to go whoring after strange gods and insignia of empire. But the lesson would never again need to be weighted with consequences so disastrous as those of the attempt to assert British sovereignty over a people nursed in the British tradition.

But—on the longest view—have we not cause to qualify that word " disastrous " ? And when we talk of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

losing America, are we not ourselves assuming that to "keep" a people, we need the outward forms of sovereignty, at least to the extent of a common Sovereign? If America should have preserved the continuity of her ancestral tradition, no matter who does the business of governing her, she is "kept" for the common civilization, as true as the needle to the pole. Blood, it has been said, is thicker than water, but the spirit is stronger than death. Do what they will, intend what they will, in the hour of freedom's ultimate peril England and America, if they rest true to themselves, will need no bonds of empire to make them of one mind and one will. And what could crowns and constitutions do more?

CHAPTER IX

A NEW START

It was in a very different atmosphere to Pudding Time that England began to take stock of her situation after the great American fiasco, and set herself to the task of national reconstruction. The old, frankly immoral power-grabbing and money-grabbing sort of patriotism that had been not ineptly described as the last resort of a scoundrel, no longer held the field unchallenged. Not that it was, or could be, killed, since there must always be a large proportion of minds incapable of rising to any higher level. But among men of acknowledged light and leading it was out of date. Poets no longer sought to enrapture their patrons by odes to commerce, or by boldly assuring Britain of her right to own or rule everything that took her fancy. Eloquence in the House of Commons started from the assumption that Britain stood for something in the world nobler than the feathering of her own nest, and that patriotism, as Bolingbroke had postulated, must be founded on great principles and supported by great virtue.

It was, perhaps, partly due to the influence of Chatham, who had as much in him of the major prophet as the statesman, that the whole conception of England and her mission in the world seemed to have been lifted a stage higher. He, the acknowledged patriot of patriots, had made it clear that the Whig cult of liberty, which on the lips of the Whig jacks in office had sounded so hollow, really meant something ; and that it was better to lose an empire than to treat it as such.

And there was something in the spirit of the age itself that favoured the new outlook. Indurated materialism had produced its own remedy. The starved emotions were

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

not to be denied ; man doth not live by common sense alone. A great emotional revival had been gathering strength during the stolid second quarter of the century. Chatham's own career had been one of its symptoms ; another had been the amazing success with which the brothers Wesley, and their fellow evangelists, had appealed to the primitive instincts of simple men with a sort of Christian Islam ; Christianity reduced to its simplest terms of feeling—the wrath of God, the blood of Christ, Hell fire, and the instant, infallible escape into an assurance of salvation that not only passed, but by-passed, all understanding.

It was in 1754 that an even mightier, but not a Christian evangelist on the Continent, had declared war on civilization itself ; for this was when Jean Jacques Rousseau had first proclaimed his gospel of original virtue—back to the savage and down to instinct ! Eight years later he had shaken the existing order to its foundations by proclaiming that man was born free, but was everywhere in chains.

The cult of freedom in England stood to gain as much from this triumph of heart over head as on the Continent, but freedom in England meant something different from the abstract and ideal liberty worshipped by Rousseau. To John Bull, liberty was nothing unless it was embodied in concrete and definite liberties ; it meant having one's rights, as by law defined. The English counterpart to Rousseau may be found in The Commentaries of Mr. Justice Blackstone on the Laws of England. For these four goodly quartos enclose a veritable pæan—one is tempted to say a romance—of the Common Law. For the first and only time its intricacies are rendered intelligible for the ordinary layman, by the services of an enthusiastic guide. Not the least telling of the points of Burke's plea for conciliation with America was the fact of Blackstone being something like a colonial best-seller.

Burke was to play a leading part in an even more striking advance in the British conception of imperial responsibility than that marked by his and Chatham's

A NEW START

attitude towards America. The colonists had at least been transplanted fellow countrymen, with common traditions of liberty, but the semi-continent of India, of which a bewildered England was waking up to find herself the suzerain, was a vast complex of Oriental tyrannies, in which the very notion of liberty had not begun to stir. Here, if anywhere, was a case for an empire on the Roman pattern, governing with a beneficent but iron hand.

But far from harbouring imperial ambitions on the subject of India, England's intentions, such as they were, had been strictly commercial. She had not, precisely speaking, gone there at all, but one of her great trading companies had done so—and that not by choice, but because their Dutch rivals, who had been much more generously supported from home, had been able to drive them away from their real objective of the East Indies, and to reduce them to such pickings as they could get on the mainland.

What no man could have foreseen was the lapse of the whole Peninsula into a state of armed chaos, in which even a trading company was drawn into a struggle for survival whose prize was the supremacy of India, with the possibility of tapping its fabulous wealth. The backing of European capital and organizing power might well confer a winning advantage over the turbaned anarchs with whom they competed, especially when this capital came to be invested in native armies, officered by Europeans. It soon became apparent that the winning advantage lay between the English company, which was a genuine business concern and paid its way, and its French rival, which was really a department of state, and did not. The clash of high political with business aims was at first anything but favourable to the English, who were quite incapable of putting up an equal show against the extremely able governors and soldiers that France was able to send out ; but money power and sea power were bound to tell in the long run, and, in the English

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

way, one of the company's own clerks, a certain Robert Clive, blossomed out into a military and political genius whose effect was not only to knock the French out of the running for good and all, but to jockey his astonished employers into the lordship of the richest and most populous province in the whole of India, that of the Lower Ganges valley, or Bengal. If ever there was a case of greatness being thrust upon any human society, it was that of John Company, because in the then state of India there was no halting place at a partial sovereignty—it must be full supremacy or nothing at all.

But a company of eighteenth century business men was ill fitted either to feel, or assume, the responsibility for the welfare of millions of human souls already living on the verge of subsistence. The directors were there to get the quickest and fattest returns possible for their shareholders, and that by such sweating of the unhappy Bengalis as constituted one of the blackest episodes even of Indian history. It was mercifully short, for as far as the English Government and nation were concerned it was the result of sheer misunderstanding. They had allowed the Company a free hand, without realizing that this had grown to be more than an affair of business. And it is surprising how soon public opinion became awake not only to the imperial, but to the moral, issue at stake. Not what was possible for England, but what was worthy of her—that was the question.

For an imperially minded Power the obvious course would have been that of displacing, absorbing, or buying out the Company, and asserting its own sovereignty over as much of India as possible. But John Bull ~~was~~ more concerned to limit, than to extend his commitments, and his instinct was to compromise by leaving the responsibility for Indian affairs with the Company, but at the same time putting the Company itself in leading strings, so as to harmonize its interests and policy with those of the State.

That this would lead, in course of time, to the Crown

A NEW START

of England becoming the Crown Imperial of India was not to be foreseen. It was more a question of whether, in the immediate future, England could retain her footing in India at all. The Company, even under its new management, was fighting a doubtful battle for survival. But for the providential genius of two men, it could hardly have succeeded. It was Clive who, turning from soldier to statesman, cleaned up the Augean stable of misrule in Bengal; and Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General to be nominated by the State and the greatest administrator India has ever known, who, against odds that might have overwhelmed any other man, not only kept alive but so strengthened and consolidated British rule as to assure its eventual triumph.

That, from the imperial standpoint, was an achievement that entitled Clive and Hastings to the unqualified gratitude of their fellow countrymen. They had, by devoted service under circumstances of incredible difficulty, laid firm the foundations of such an Indian empire as not even the Great Moguls had been able to achieve. And whatever means they had found necessary to so great an end as that of imposing the *Pax Britannica* upon tortured India, might surely be deemed justified by the result.

But England was capable of regarding the matter not only imperially, but also morally, and in no reputable system of morals does the end justify the means. The cases of Clive and Hastings will probably go on being argued to the end of time, and an agreed verdict will never be obtained, because each side is appealing to a different code. And the principle relied upon by the defence is summed up in that immortally notorious sentence, "He who has been threatened like ourselves, and is fighting for what he most prizes, can only consider how he is to hack through."

Clive and Hastings had hacked through, and it is at least arguable that without such rough-hewing they would never have got through. It is certain that they

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

had been playing their lone hand against expert sharpers who would stick at nothing whatever, and compared with whose methods their own were the soul of honour. But it is also certain that each of them had condescended on occasion to expedients impossible to justify by those standards of rectitude that—in so far as she has conformed to them—have proved England's greatest asset in the East.

And on the whole, never has the English Parliament shown to better advantage than in its handling of these momentous issues. The Parliamentary inquiry on Clive resulted in no more than a moderately worded censure, coupled with the recognition of his great and meritorious services to the State. A better balance could hardly have been struck between the assertion of abstract principle and personal gratitude.

In the case of Hastings, the treatment meted to the accused was far more debatable. There is no doubt that personal venom of the most rancorous sort had poisoned in advance every point that could be made against him. Hastings' Hindu subjects might have conjectured him to have sinned beyond all measure in a previous existence, to have merited such a colleague, and such an enemy, as Sir Philip Francis. But it is beyond reasonable doubt that Burke, who arraigned him at the Bar of the Lords, believed from the bottom of his soul that he himself was standing for principles of morality, by which any British dominion overseas must stand or fall. It is by no means to be assumed that he was wrong.

"A British Governor ought to govern upon British principles, not by British forms. God forbid ! for if ever there was a case in which the letter kills and the spirit gives life, it would be an attempt to introduce British forms and the substance of despotic principles together into any country. No ! We call for that spirit of equity, that spirit of justice, that spirit of safety, that spirit of protection, that spirit of lenity, which ought to characterize every British subject in power ; and upon these, and these principles only, he will be tried."

A NEW START

Even if the man Hastings should be acquitted at the bar of eternal, as he was of temporal, justice, the momentous significance of these words would be in no way diminished. They fix a standard of moral obligation which Britain may often have failed to satisfy, but which she will never henceforth cease to acknowledge. Upon these principles, and these principles only, she stands to be justified or condemned.

In what other contemporary nation would such a standpoint have been conceivable? The game of diamond cut diamond between competing despotisms was certainly not liable to be deflected by mixing politics with morals.

And before taking leave of the Hastings case, we must note the part in it played by the young Premier, William Pitt, who, with much less than Burke's dazzling imagination, put into concrete practice that morality which Burke formulated in the abstract. For without lashing himself up into any transport of righteous indignation, he applied those same principles coolly and dispassionately to the evidence, and having absolved Hastings on two of the main charges, to the general surprise voted against him on a third, and by that vote made his impeachment certain. That was the English as Burke's was the Irish way; the Englishman at his best, chary of philosophy, but resolved to see fair play all round, no less for the Governor than for the native—"to no man will we deny or delay right or justice." Unhappily, in the sequel, though not denied, justice was delayed through years of ruinous litigation, before the Peers, after the most painstaking and impartial investigation, pronounced Hastings' acquittal. But this was not the only sign of how all things were beginning to work together in the direction of British liberty. As early as 1772 it had been decided, through the lips of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, that no man could be a slave on English soil. That great judge had moved heaven and earth to avoid having to give a decision that went so much against his personal grain, but the spirit of the Common Law was too strong

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

for him. And from that decision we may date the birth of the great agitation against the very principle of slavery, which, beginning with a devoted band of enthusiasts, in an extraordinarily short time captured public opinion in a nation much of whose commercial prosperity had been based on the infamous business of supplying African slaves to the American plantations.

The importance of this movement lies in its furnishing a clear case of moral purpose affecting a nation's policy. England had no axe to grind in taking up the cause of the slaves, and she did show herself capable, on more than one occasion, of putting principle before interest where it was concerned. The leaders of what was then the new conquering movement towards a more humane and imaginative outlook, were unanimous in their horror at what even Mansfield had described as "so odious that nothing can be suffered to support it but positive law".

Meanwhile, without anyone realizing it, the tempo of human progress was being quickened beyond all previous experience, and this with a greater acceleration in England than anywhere else. The result of her prehistoric insulation was now beginning to materialize. Her comparative security behind her wooden walls had enabled her to get on with her trade and industry to such an extent that, unlike her neighbours, whose armies exhausted their wealth as fast as they could make it, she was able to employ her surplus takings in the business of making yet more wealth. Capital was shouting for employment, and if necessity is the mother, capital is certainly the father, of invention. The inventive talent of the country was, in fact, mobilized in order to find ways and means of making wealth produce wealth. The most decisive dates of the century are not those of kings and battles, but of cumulative applications of science to industry, all preparing the way for the triumph of steam power, which is confirmed by the invention of the power loom in 1785.

England, which for the time being had secured for

A NEW START

herself a monopoly of these new processes, thus found herself in a position of such overwhelming material advantage that the American War, which had appeared to land her in the lowest depth of shame and disaster, proved the merest bagatelle. Once that nuisance was liquidated, she went forward as never before on the road to prosperity.

But it was not only in the material sense that progress was astir. The bitter draught of her American humiliation had acted not only as a purge, but as a tonic. The King might and did dish his Whigs for a second time, and get his own selected Premier triumphantly installed in office, but that Premier was the son of Chatham and his spiritual heir. And as for the Whigs they, under the inspiration of Charles James Fox, were beginning to translate the old lip-homage to freedom into practical terms that might have made Newcastle or Walpole turn in their graves. Reform was in the air ; the eloquence of Parliament's golden age, when Burke and Sheridan, Pitt and Fox were at their zenith, had a common basis of progressive Liberalism. Who can doubt that given a generation of normal development, Britain would have discovered, and proved to the world, that her truth to herself was a living truth, and that freedom, in a British environment, would find out its own way ?

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION

“**H**OW much the greatest event it is that ever happened in the world, and how much the best !” Such was the reaction of Charles James Fox, leader of the Whig Opposition in the Commons, to the tremendous news of the storming of the Bastille by the Parisian mob ; an event that, followed as it shortly was by the fall of Versailles itself, while châteaux all over France went up in flame, announced to the world that the key-stone had been knocked out of the arch of French civilization. And to say French was to say European ; since the social order, the ancient regime of the eighteenth century, was a French model.

Only a mind so ardent and imaginative as that of Fox was capable of appreciating, all at once, the importance of this drama that was unfolding so swiftly on the other side of the Channel. But the reception of its opening act, by a British audience, was almost unanimously favourable. For a hundred years now, Britain’s arch enemy, actual or potential, had borne the name of Louis. And no British patriot could be expected to feel anything but satisfaction at the spectacle of these autocrats, who had butted in to the support of democratic revolution in America, getting some of their own medicine. Besides which—was not France paying England the sincerest form of flattery by sloughing her ancient despotism, and adopting those same constitutional principles that had been vindicated so gloriously in the English Revolution ?

The advanced thought of this very progressive time was something more than merely complacent. To young romantics like Wordsworth, this red dawn of liberty was

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

one in which it was bliss to be alive. As in the days of the Great Rebellion, there was a revolutionary left wing whose aims went far beyond those even of the most liberal-minded among the wealthy politicians, and whose activities, being largely subterranean, it was as hard to estimate as it was easy to overestimate. But to the average John Bull, what was happening in France was none of his business, except in so far as it provided his country with the opportunity of minding it, at home and abroad, without French interference. So it was in the spirit of a benevolent, or of a slightly malicious, Gallo that he marked the development of this interesting imbroglio in French domestic politics. And that was undoubtedly the standpoint of the Government, with its brilliant young Premier, who had worked such miracles in restoring the shattered prosperity and prestige of Britain, and who had no other desire than to live and let live in peace, nor the least apprehension of the fire that had taken hold of his neighbour's house spreading to his own.

Certainly not one Englishman in a thousand, on hearing about the Bastille, or for quite a year afterwards, would have thought of this, or any other Parisian event, as the greatest in history. Perhaps even Fox, in his vehement way of writing, said more than he would have been prepared seriously to endorse, except from the standpoint of the enthusiastic partisan, raising the loudest possible cheer at the spectacle of the most King-ridden nation in Europe transforming itself into a Whig Utopia. The deeper significance of this new phenomenon of the French Revolution, not only to France but to Europe and the whole course of civilization, had hardly begun to be suspected. We may doubt whether its full implications have been grasped, even to-day.

For our own tendency, unlike that of these first observers, is to allow it to fill the whole of the picture to the exclusion of everything else. We are all—or almost all—Foxites, to the extent of believing that the French

CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION

Revolution is *the* revolution, from which the whole present phase of modern history starts. It has a monopoly of the dramatic high lights—the fall of the great dungeon fortress, the execution of a King, the Terror, the victories, all leading up to the portentous rise and triumph of Napoleon. And we forget that during all this time a revolution, as English in its origin as the other was French, was proceeding simultaneously, with no high lights at all—for who would think of ranking the advance of steam engines from single to double action, or the harnessing of mechanical power to looms, among the greatest, let alone the best—or the worst—events that have ever happened?

And yet it is arguable that this mechanical revolution was fraught with consequences even more momentous than those of the political and social earthquake that convulsed Europe and monopolized all the attention. For here was something new, something that amounted to the revolutionizing of revolution itself. The species Man, having through ages adapted itself to one environment, was precipitating itself into another. Judging by the experience of every species before it, this was an act of wanton suicide. As it was, the sole conceivable way of salvation that offered was by a revolution in the creature as swift and drastic as that of his surroundings—such a call as no creature had hitherto proved capable of answering. Perhaps a dawning intuition of this had had some part in the great intellectual ferment that had led up to the revolution in France; a feeling that man himself was due to be translated to a new scope and a new freedom. We can see how Shelley, who more than any other Englishman was formed in the school of those ill-fated visionaries, believed that it was only a comparatively simple matter of getting rid of kings and priests to produce a new earth and a new race of human gods to inhabit it.

Nothing is more remarkable, if we look beneath the surface of events, than the way in which these two revolutions, the mechanical and the human, act upon each

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

other. There is more than a little reason for believing that the cause that more than any other precipitated the downfall of the old regime was the conclusion of a commercial treaty with England, three years previously, that had exposed the budding industry of North-Eastern France to the full competition of British machine-produced goods, and thus created a surplus of unemployed who drifted to Paris ready for any desperate adventure, and became the nucleus of the revolutionary mob. That, however, is an admittedly debatable point ; what is beyond controversy is that it was her machine power applied under the protection of her steam power, that gave Britain strength, in the long run, to fight down the menace of the Revolution and the empire that rose out of it.

Here we are concerned with this matter of the Revolution as it affects that spirit of liberty which, as I have tried to show, is the living and growing soul of British civilization, and was becoming more and more to be recognized as such in that dawn of romantic idealism. And who could doubt that Britain had every moral as well as material interest in the triumph, in France, of those principles of freedom and representative government for which she had been a lone Abdiel in an apostate Europe ?

Not even, therefore, the fall of the Bastille was calculated to produce so profound a sensation in England as a pamphlet—if we can apply that name to a book of 356 pages—that was launched in the November of the following year by that most approved and uncompromising champion of British liberties, Burke, in which he denounced and abjured the Revolution and all its works with an eloquence so compelling as to constitute a revolutionary event in itself, in that it completely and finally exploded the notion that what was happening in France had anything in common with British notions of constitutional liberty.

That was the chief and vital point of this apocalyptic

CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION

pronouncement, which takes the mind by storm and leaves the critical faculty overwhelmed. For Burke was no traitor to the liberties of England, but, on the contrary, vindicated them in such an inspired panegyric as even he had never yet uttered. Magna Charta, Sir Edward Coke, the Petition of Right, the Revolution Settlement, and Blackstone are cited, in majestic procession, to prove that these liberties are no sudden figment of the imagination but "an *entailed inheritance*, derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to posterity".

"By this means," says Burke, "our liberty becomes a noble freedom. It carries an imposing and majestic aspect. It has a pedigree and illustrating ancestors. It has its bearings and ensigns armorial. It has its gallery of portraits; its monumental inscriptions; its records, evidences and titles . . .," in short, an evolutionary freedom, that has grown up, like the British oak through the course of ages, and with its roots deep in the national soil.

Having thus dealt with the native model, Burke turns to that other sort of liberty, which was being proclaimed as the inspiring principle of the new era across the Channel—and remember that at this time the Revolution was still in its confident, dawning phase of hope and universal benevolence. But Burke, with an intuition accurately prophetic, shows that liberty in the abstract, without any foundation in the past or of established rights, is the most powerful engine of despotism ever forged. For even the old French monarchy, with all its centralization of power, had never succeeded in making itself wholly and completely despotic. All sorts of ancient customs and privileges, local and provincial rights, patriotisms within patriotism, had lingered on, and prevented the smooth response of the great machine to one man's control. All these now, in the name of the new liberty, were to be levelled out flat. And to what end? Burke, writing before the event, is able to predict:

"All the indirect restraints that mitigate despotism

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

are removed in as much that, if monarchy should ever again obtain an entire ascendancy in France under this or any other dynasty, it will probably be . . . the most arbitrary that ever appeared on earth."

Yes—but what sort of monarchy? That also Burke is able to foresee with a certainty almost mathematical. Amid the general levelling of rights, no argument will be left but that of force. Power will inevitably gravitate to the army, "everything depends upon the army in such a government as yours," and power of the army is bound to become a one man dictatorship, an *imperium*.

Here are Burke's words, penned at a time when he who was destined to fulfil them was still an obscure sub-lieutenant. As a description of what did, need this of what was going to happen be added to?

"The officers of an army will remain for some time mutinous and full of faction, until some popular general, who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command, shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself. Armies will obey him on his personal account. . . . And the moment in which that event shall happen, the person who really commands the army is your master; the master (that is little) of your king, the master of your assembly, the master of your whole republic."

Criticize Burke as we will we cannot fail to admit that history has delivered the goods—or ills—in exact accordance with his specification.

It is only to be wondered at that having penetrated so deep, he should not have gone deeper still, and have perceived that all this was nothing new; but as true in Paris as it had been at Philippi, that

"O Julius Cæsar, thou art mighty yet!
Thy spirit walks abroad. . . ."

for it was the undying spirit of Rome that, in the most logical of all nations, was working itself towards its destined conclusion. The principle of kingship, which had after all been imported by the barbarians, and as such

CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION

had its roots in freedom, was now to be superseded by that of permanent dictatorship, or empire ; and having gone so far along the Roman road, it could not fail but that the empire of France should make its bid for that of Europe. And to prevent this would automatically become a life or death matter for England.

It was not that England had even now come to behold the situation with the frenzied eye of Mr. Burke, who had perceived the abomination of desolation taking shape at Paris, and called the whole of Europe to stamp out the evil thing while it was yet in its infancy. John Bull is not to be rushed into extreme courses even by a major prophet, and though it soon became apparent that all in France was working out to prediction, he still was inclined to the opinion that though this orgy of sacrilege, confiscation, murder, and regicide in the name of liberty was a bad and ugly business, it was still not his business. And this continued to be most emphatically the view of Mr. Pitt, as representative an Englishman as Burke was an Irishman, and the last person to be swept into any ideological crusade. Even when armed intervention of Prussia and Austria was plainly impending, he was cutting down the navy, and confidently predicting fifteen years' peace—as far, at any rate, as England was concerned.

It was well enough for Burke, from those lofty regions to which he had soared, to summon the Powers of Christian Europe, like another Peter the Hermit, to a holy war, but Pitt, who had his feet firmly on the ground, knew well enough what such a war would have signified in practice, and what the idealism of his prospective partners amounted to. The three principal of them were, in fact, too busily employed in competing, like vultures, for the body of helpless Poland, to put any convincing vigour into the rescue of the Christian civilization and the shortly-to-be-martyred Royal Family of France. Under these circumstances Pitt, and Pitt's England, were prepared to offer no more than their heartfelt sympathy, even when horror was piled on horror's head

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

and King Louis himself constrained to spit into the basket.

This uninspired determination to carry on from day to day without regard to those larger issues that determine the grand strategy of statesmanship is—even in the light of events—not incapable of defence. Burke's flaming imagination had, indeed, apprised him that this new spirit masquerading as liberty in France was, in fact, not new at all, but the mortal enemy of British civilization, shortly to be incarnate in a mightier Cæsar than those whose menace she had defied in the past. But it does not follow that this spirit would have been laid by the simple process of burying it beneath the ruins of Paris. It would merely have been transferred, and to a more dangerous quarter even than France. The despots who had partitioned Poland were equally in the running for the imperial stakes. It was all a matter of time and opportunity.

It is at least arguable that under these circumstances Pitt was well advised in holding his country's hand, and refusing to take any side, on her behalf, but her own. Let the French go to Hell in their own way, so long as they left Britain alone. It was only when, in the name of their ideology, they absolved themselves from their covenanted obligations and began to threaten Britain's vital interests, that he drew the sword. For the foundations of Christian civilization God might provide, but the safety of the Low Countries was a matter for England. It was the attitude of the undying John Bull—not Right in the abstract, nor even Liberty, is worth a quarrel, but touch one of *my* rights, or make free with one of *my*—or perhaps even my neighbour's—liberties, and you start a fight to a finish.

That did not prevent the war that started over the navigation of the River Scheldt from developing into one of nothing less than rival civilizations, that of Britain fighting, as it had done before, and would do again, for its right and room to fulfil the destiny towards the

CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION

consciousness of which it was still blindly feeling its way, foreshadowed in the words of an even greater contemporary seer than Burke :

“ Empire is no more, and now the lion and the wolf shall cease.”

But the realization of that lay far in the future, and at the beginning of the contest, and for its first few years, it was by no means obvious what Britain was fighting about, or what against. A very great number of Englishmen, and particularly of the upper classes, were inclined to accept Burke's view that this was no ordinary war, but a crusade against the revolutionary ideology to put back the old regime into France, Bourbons and all. And even Pitt, as the struggle developed, seemed veering dangerously towards that view, which was one fraught with as mortal peril to Britain as any from without. For there was a real danger lest, in her effort to conquer the Revolution, she should make a shameful conquest of, and abjure her truth to, herself.

For we must remember that the very life of British civilization was bound up with its continuous development. Once let it cease to grow, and it died, by petrification. Just at the time when the Revolution had broken out, it seemed on the full tide of progress, about to make up for the long accumulated arrears of the eighteenth century. But now the opening of the democratic flood-gates in France had rendered all progress suspect, even in matters of pure culture. That brilliant organ of upper-class Toryism, *The Anti-Jacobin*, lumped in one common condemnation the blood-stained chiefs of the Terror, and authors like Lamb, Southey, Coleridge, and Goethe, who were merely guilty of advanced tendencies, even in metre. How much more was this the case in politics, where to enfranchise a town like Manchester or to allow a trades' union to be formed would be to let in the thin end of the revolutionary wedge !

For it was not long before the complacent mood in which the war had started began to give way to one of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

reactionary hysteria. By Mr. Pitt's Government, the war had been started on particularly safe and orthodox lines, and it had seemed the simplest matter in the world, with most of Europe for allies, to repeat Chatham's plan of keeping the French busy in Europe while England pocketed all that was left of their empire overseas. It was only gradually that the full seriousness of the situation began to be unmasked. It was an utterly new sort of France that had arisen out of the ashes of the old regime, the new and frightful phenomenon of a nation in arms, out to win as no opponent had ever been before, and with resources such as not even Louis XIV, driven to bay, had proved capable of mobilizing.

What had begun as a parade march of seasoned regulars on a mob-defended capital developed into a counter-offensive destined, before its force was spent, to overwhelm every capital from Moscow to Lisbon in a series of wars that were really successive spasms of one. Four times did this new France dictate a victorious peace to every enemy that dared to challenge her, and each successive peace left her with frontiers fantastically expanded, and more unquestionably than ever supreme over the Continent of Europe. But always there remained unconquered and defiant the island on her flank, and never, except during one brief interval of truce, did the stranglehold of its sea power for a moment relax. It was as if, in some unrecorded episode of the Arabian Nights, an otherwise irresistible champion had been forced to encounter successive relays of enemies with the Old Man of the Sea irremovably fastened on to his back.

But that is to embrace the whole contest in one retrospective view, which was beyond the scope of Pitt, or any of those who bore the brunt of the first heart-breaking years of frustration and disillusionment. For them, there was scarcely any relief from a series of accumulating disasters from which no human power could certainly have foreseen a victorious issue. For, even in the light of our present knowledge, there is no warrant for asserting

CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION

that such an issue was certain. Things might so easily have gone differently. A French landing in force on the coast of Ireland, for instance, might have rallied the whole Catholic population to its side in another War of Independence; the mutiny of the fleet at the Nore might have laid the country open to invasion—and in this same year, 1797, to this threat there was added that of bankruptcy. Not only had England's continental allies retired or been knocked out of the war, but Spain and Holland had added their forces to those of France.

But these actual dangers paled before those that *seemed* actual. For this was not like the old, gentlemanly wars, in which the enemy was at least an ally in maintaining the existing order of society—a fact that accounted for a great deal of martial and aristocratic chivalry. This enemy professed, at least, to be conducting a war not so much of nations, as a vast, revolutionary upheaval of the depressed and dispossessed classes everywhere. Just as Pitt's gold was the bogey of all patriotic Frenchmen, so, to Pitt himself, and anyone with property, and a head, to lose, the operations of secret societies and the Hidden Hand assumed a fearful importance. It is easy for us to see these fears, which so signally failed to materialize, in their true perspective. But to those who had the spectacle of the Terror and the guillotine constantly present to their imaginations, who knew that a network of Corresponding Societies and other subversive agencies, presumably on the lines of the terrible Parisian clubs, was actually in being, and who had seen the King in danger of being lynched by a howling mob on his way to open Parliament, it was only human to forebode the worst, and to clamour for any, and every, measure to safeguard the home front. And Mr. Pitt, always with his instinct of concentrating on each day's need as it presented itself, was not the man to take chances.

And hence the war—as war on a grand scale was destined to be in the future—became fraught with a double danger to that liberty for which it was England's part to stand. It

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

was an old Roman maxim that among arms, the laws are silent ; which, rendered into modern English, is as much as to say that when you are fighting for your life, you cannot afford the luxury of constitutional principles. That is well enough if, after the manner of the old Roman Republic, you can put those principles into temporary cold storage. It was what had been done under the Tudors, and what the Government attempted to do now. It got Parliament to arm it, year by year, with the right, possessed by the Tudors, of holding suspected persons in prison without trial, and so tightened up the law against treason and sedition as to create practically a state of siege. Troops were quartered all over the country in a way suggestive of Cromwell's Major-Generals, and their activities were reinforced by an army of spies and informers.

But the abeyance of the Constitution was not nearly so dangerous as the blind worship of it that had now become the duty of every patriot. King, Country, and Constitution were a fine, alliterative trinity to invoke against the revolutionary horror. And the Constitution was envisaged as something complete and perfect in every respect, to which it would be sacrilege to make the minutest addition. Which promised to be as fatal to the Constitution itself as the casing of a child in armour to prevent it from growing. And the danger was rendered more than ever acute from the fact that change *was* taking place on a scale, and with a rapidity beyond all precedent. The only question was whether it was possible to adapt the framework of society to this accelerating tempo, or wait until the new forces had gathered enough strength to burst it to pieces. Behind that lay an even more pregnant query—was it possible to raise the mind and spirit of mankind up to the level of these new demands ?

And the first answer to both questions, by those who had power to shape the destinies of the country, was a blank negative. It was human ; it was, from its own standpoint, overwhelmingly cogent. A nation fighting

CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION

for its life has no time for problems of reconstruction. In the face of the enemy, discipline must be preserved at all costs. A man in Pitt's position, who knows that it is but a step between the country and ruin, may be excused for feeling that he cannot afford to take chances. But when the crisis is stretched out for nearly a generation, during all of which the process of change is at work with increasing momentum, the risks involved in standing still may overbalance any, even, of a leap in the dark.

And the mere process of stagnation may tend to harden into a habit of mind. The upper class, and particularly the squire class, that were the backbone of a now fixed Tory majority, having won the war by an invincible capacity for standing still, might imagine that they had discovered a simple panacea for all future discontents of society. The original horror of Jacobinism might become a fixed obsession. From the invincible obstinacy that sometimes wins a war, to the invincible stupidity that always loses a peace, the transition may be imperceptible.

And the upper class had been hit by the Revolution in a way it little suspected. The natural brutality and boorishness of squires living all the year round on their country estates and, like Fielding's Squire Western, hardly more cultured in thought and speech than their own labourers, had been at least modified by such influences as could permeate from that great fountain-head of European culture in Paris and its surrounding palaces. And there was always the civilized leaven of those who had been able to stock their minds with the best that France, and Europe, had to bestow, and who formed an urbane intelligentsia not unworthy to compare—in its own way—with the brilliant society of the French *salons*. The names of Chesterfield, Horace Walpole, Boswell, Burke, Gibbon, Cavendish, and their like are enough proof of this. The average big country mansion, at least, was far from being bucolic, stocked, as it was, with beautifully bound copies of all available classics of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

English and foreign literature, and more often than not adorned with masterpieces of ancient and modern art—itsself very often an architectural masterpiece. But now the fountain-head was not only cut off, but dried up. France was no longer, even in enmity, the teacher and pattern of living. On the contrary, she had become the symbol of everything base ; poets like Wordsworth could deplore her “want of books and men”, patriots like Nelson could deliver themselves of such sentiments as “I hate, hate, hate the French !” which, in any earlier war, would certainly have been considered language more fitted for the fo’castle than the quarter deck.

The loss, to the landed upper class of England, of its civilizing leaven was, though gradual in its effects, deadly. The figure of the fox-hunting squire, romantic only in sentimental retrospect, now dominates the landscape. Trophies of the chase are accumulated instead of books ; the country mansion ceases to afford harborage to the Muses, and becomes a base in a truceless war against vermin, a place for swilling and propagating, and recruiting energy for fresh muscular debauches. A governing class, proud of being too stupid to know when it is beaten, but not ashamed of being too stupid to govern intelligently—that was the fatal gift of the French Revolution to Britain.

One thing, however, that class could do—it could win the war, or allow the war to be won under its leadership. And it could do so, by dint of no intelligence, but by sheer absence of mind. After it had got over its first fright about revolutionary activities in England, it declined to be put out of its stride by the French menace. It refused to take even Napoleon seriously. Apart from those of its sons who took up the genteel profession of arms, it almost contrived to forget that there was a war on—though when the Grand Army was actually encamped in sight of England, it did take the lead in volunteer parades more spectacular than soldierly. Even when the situation was at its most serious, it was too

CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION

stupid to recognize its seriousness. It endured to the end, because no alternative occurred to it.

And at the head of this class, the very embodiment of its mulishly invincible will to win, stood Pitt himself, conspicuous in the nation's eye as the pilot who could weather even this storm: not the master mariner his father had been, but a plain, competent seaman with iron nerve and unshakable confidence, even when the ship was half a wreck and the gale driving her on to a lee shore. His very nose, tilted defiantly in the air, was enough to reassure the timides of passengers that with him at the helm she would come safely to port. His very lack of imagination, his traditionally English incapacity of knowing when he was, or that he ever could be, beaten, had a tonic effect that not even the innumerable blunders perpetrated under his leadership could undo. And this—for reasons he himself was quite incapable of appreciating—rendered him almost the ideal war leader at this particular juncture, when it was only a question of hanging on long enough to let Britain's overwhelming superiority in machine power exhaust the enemy's resources.

The ideal leader—if it had only been a question, as it had become with Pitt, of winning the war. But there was a greater danger even than that constituted by the armed might of France. For, if we may trust to the wisdom of Shakespeare, the ultimate and mortal peril to England could only come from within. Let her forfeit her truth to herself, and a thousand Trafalgars or Waterloos would not save her—she would cease to be England. The Revolution, at its worst, had more of real congruity with the spirit that was in her than the reactionary despotisms with whom she was in alliance to suppress it. The seeds were already planted of the great democratic alliance that was to supersede an age-long enmity. If Burke's programme *had* succeeded, and the ancient regime had been put back—England would have been hard put to it indeed to preserve her own civilization.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

That is why, looking back on this dark and critical hour, we have cause to mingle our gratitude to Pitt and those other patriots who did at least fulfil the prime and obvious task of weathering the storm, with an equal tribute to that minority of liberal-minded men to whom, even in the utmost stress of conflict, it remained more important even than victory for England to stand fast by those principles which alone made victory worth winning. And in this connection the name of Charles James Fox rises to the mind—for, indeed, the names of Pitt and Fox, like those of Disraeli and Gladstone, are so inseparably linked that neither seems complete without the other, and they constitute a great dual personality, each half supplying what the other lacks, and each fulfilling itself through the very conflict and dialectic of their unending duel.

Fox is a character particularly hard to appreciate in the light of a political record that made him, not without reason, the most distrusted, as Pitt was the most trusted figure in British politics. There was a certain moral levity about his proceedings for which, in the eyes of the ordinary John Bull, no amount of brilliance can ever atone—the man who can carry rancour so far as to swear that there was no address that his rival Pitt could possibly frame to which he would not propose some amendment, rendered himself only too suspect of being ready to put party before country, and personal spite before everything. And those who accuse Fox of being ready to risk the safety of the ship in order to get even with the pilot, have a case hard to refute.

But in spite of everything, it is to Fox, in his lonely and impotent opposition, that British civilization is beholden, as much as to Pitt in office. For Fox saw just that aspect of the situation to which Pitt was blind ; he remembered and kept in public remembrance that very truth, of England to herself, that England had forgotten. To Pitt nothing else mattered than to bring his country through peril to victory ; to Fox, no peril nor necessity

CONSTITUTION VERSUS REVOLUTION

formed sufficient excuse for her abating one jot or one tittle of that championship of liberty which ennobles patriotism. And here it is Fox who stands forth as the man of principle, and Pitt as the man of opportunity. Whatever might be the crimes of the revolutionaries, they could be no excuse, in Fox's eyes, for England taking part in a reactionist crusade ; and, at home, on no plea of military necessity ought the liberties of the subject be violated or the Constitution set at naught.

Perhaps Chatham, if he could have lived, might have harmonized, in one spirit, the will to win and the determination to be free. Perhaps . . . but there has been only one Chatham in modern history—and it was the next best thing that the British cause should be committed to such joint trusteeship of mighty, yet complementary, opposites.

CHAPTER II

“ENGLAND WILL SAVE EUROPE”

Before the end of the century, the revolutionary bogey had laid itself. France had ceased even to pose as the champion of liberty, and was more frankly out for the part of universal tyrant than in the palmiest days of monarchy. Even while she still retained the outward semblance of a republic, her proceedings had been such as to disillusion the most ardent of her English sympathizers. The young romantics who had hailed her red dawn, now recoiled in horror from the spectacle of free peoples bludgeoned into submission by armies whose methods only differed in efficiency from those of banditti.

The real and fundamental menace had now begun plainly to define itself; it was not liberty or any new-fangled Jacobin notion, but the undying spirit of Rome. Julius Cæsar was mighty yet, and mightier than ever in his new incarnation as Napoleon Buonaparte, the military leader whose advent Burke had foreseen, and who, gathering to himself all the powers of the State, and true to ancient form, assumed the Roman titles of First Consul, Dictator for life, and, finally, of Emperor. It was not only Cæsar himself, but the whole development of Cæsarism that he summed in his career; a thing rendered possible by the effect of the Revolution in flattening out every hindrance to the process of centralization. In that *tabula rasa* of artificial departments, it was possible for the new Emperor to say with far more unqualified truth than any son of St. Louis—“The State am I.”

Not only Cæsar, but Divine Cæsar! With a magnificently symbolic gesture the new Emperor, at his coronation, had snatched the crown from the hand of the

“ENGLAND WILL SAVE EUROPE”

Pontifex Maximus—henceforward to be his vassal and prisoner—and put it on his own head. In the words of Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, “the worship of Rome and Augustus may be matched by the imperial catechism made by the hand of Napoleon himself, and enjoining semi-divine honours to be paid to the office and person of the Emperor of the French.”

The first major step of the new potentate, after having secured his power by one of his smashing victories, was to endow his new realm with an up-to-date version of that Roman law that had been the very soul of the Empire. All that remained now was for the legions, striking out from Cæsar’s own province of Gaul, to repeat the old process of imperial expansion, and to unite at least Western Europe under the shadow of the imperial peace. Nor did this appear to present any insuperable difficulty. This army, this nation in arms, was something different in kind from anything modern times had seen. It had shown itself time and again capable of shattering anything that could be put up against it. It was flushed with the assurance of its own invincibility. And already expansion had been stretched to lengths of which the Sun King, in all his glory, would never have dared to dream. If these things could be done under the Republic—of what would not the Empire, the State forged as an instrument of victory by the hand of Cæsar himself, be capable?

The only way in which the spirit of the new French differed from that of the old Latin model was in being more Roman than Rome itself. It carried the logic of Cæsarism a step further than Trajan or Diocletian, and by the Western path from which Constantine and his successors had diverged, towards that goal for which the twentieth century was to find a name—Totalitarianism; that of the absolute and passionate self-immolation of the individual, soul and body, in the community, and the community summed up in one single individual, the man-god, the Almighty *ad hoc*.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

True, the model was not yet perfect. The application of machine power to propaganda was still in the pre-steam stage ; the overwhelming resources at the disposal of him who nowadays controls the state machinery were beyond the reach of Napoleon, though his organizing genius worked miracles with the control of the Press, of education, and the whole hierarchy of administration. But he needed all his genius and all the prestige of his victories to maintain his position. No mere gangster or bawling demagogue could have imposed the fiction of his divinity upon the most critical people in Europe. Nor could totalitarianism under his auspices achieve the full measure of its totality. Napoleon's regime was tolerant to a degree that would be tolerated by no modern dictator. Jews and heretics of all sorts were allowed the fullest scope, within the limits of political conformity.

Against this new power, there could be no question of Britain's attitude. A new Roman Empire of the Continent, in control of the Low Countries—and Napoleon himself described Antwerp as a pistol held at the head of England—was a threat to her very existence, a danger to be averted at all costs. The new Empire, with its centre of expansion no longer at Rome but at Paris, would be even less likely than the old to endure an unconquered Britain. Napoleon himself was not under the least illusion on this point. Until he had annihilated this enemy, his imperial peace could never be consummated. If Cæsar was to rule the nations with his sway Britannia must cease to rule the waves—she whose navies claimed to dominate even the ancient Roman sea, and whose spirit was one of irreconcilable revolt against all for which Rome stood.

And the more one studies his career, the more plainly one sees that Napoleon's whole mind was bent to the accomplishment of this one, unswerving purpose. Whichever way he strikes, it is always England at which he is aiming. Sooner or later he will arrive at London, if it has to be by way of Egypt, or of Moscow. When his army

“ENGLAND WILL SAVE EUROPE”

was encamped on Boulogne cliffs, he caused a medal to be struck depicting a Hercules crushing a merman, half-man, half-fish, in his arms. It was as plain a visualization as has ever been of a great mind's wish dream.

And here we can detect unmistakable symptoms of that madness—or at least obsession—into which genius so easily lapses. For Napoleon was driven, by the very intensity of his desire, to make light of the obstacles to its accomplishment. “Impossible !” he once had said, “never let me hear that foolish word !” a sentiment that every mental doctor must hear echoed, in one form or another, twenty times a day. That baffling and elusive sea power with which England opposed him was so intolerable a limitation of his will to power, that his mind could hardly dwell upon the thought of it. Not once, but repeatedly, he elected to ignore it, like a bird dashing itself against a glass window. To maroon his army in Egypt while England controlled the Mediterranean ; to ferry his army across the Channel, when at the miraculous best it would be cut off from France within a matter of hours ; these things seemed to him sane and feasible. They had *got* to be.

Otherwise that word “impossible” might turn out to be only too much to the point. For it was beyond the capacity even of a superman to find the means of simultaneously crushing the land power of the Continent and the sea power of the island civilization. And behind the wooden walls of that sea power, England was free to develop that of her new machinery. Napoleon himself can scarcely have realized how profound a truth there was in his description of the English as a nation of shop-keepers. For England had, indeed, become an enormous shop, turning out cheap goods by methods of mass production at prices with which no rival establishment could dream of competing. Which meant, that so long as her seaways could be kept open, streams of wealth were converging on to her shores from every quarter of the globe—including France itself, for not even

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Napoleon was always proof against the temptation of surreptitious dealings with the very establishment he sought to boycott. England, in her capacity of universal provider, had succeeded in making herself indispensable.

That is by no means to imply that these streams of wealth were percolating through the whole of her social system, so as to turn her into a happy and a smiling land. For that, a planned and scientific irrigation would have been needed, such as had hardly, as yet, been even thought of. And how could her rulers be expected to undertake so vast and unprecedented a labour of reconstruction, when the country was standing up single-handed to Imperial Cæsar at the head of the leagued forces of the Continent? How be expected to build up society again from its foundations, when the least change had come to signify, to their minds, the thin end of the revolutionary wedge? They were practical statesmen, and some of them, at least, of far above ordinary competence, but they were not of the stuff of which saviours are made—and nothing less than this would have been required.

Left thus to accomplish itself, the birth of the new age was in sorrow unspeakable. It is more a case for pity than for indignation. The new towns, or vast slums, that were proliferated hugger mugger round the new centres of machine power in the North and Midlands, the ghastly conditions of employment, the holocausts of sweated children, were the result not of wickedness but of anarchy; it was like the panic-stricken stampede of a crowd through a bottle-neck. The employers, with cut-throat competition threatening imminent bankruptcy, were themselves driven as remorselessly as they were compelled to drive.

And the rigours of transition were rendered ten times more acute by the stress of war. The great struggle had commenced with what we may call the revolutionary phase, in which the contest was ostensibly one between

“ENGLAND WILL SAVE EUROPE”

the regal and republican ideologies, that, on the Continent, ended in a complete victory for France, but as between France and England, in a complete stalemate. With the coming of Napoleon to power, this phase passes into another, in which, after a patched-up truce that is only a breathing space, Napoleon aims at a decision against England by the knock-out blow of an invasion.

This England, by the use of her sea power, easily contrives to evade, while by the employment of a money based on machine power, she organizes a grand rally of the Continental sovereignties against him. This drives Napoleon to the alternative of gathering the whole force of Western Europe under his hand before coming to the final reckoning with England. He withdraws his Grand Army from its station on the cliffs at Boulogne, and hurls it eastward, smashing everything in its path up to the frontiers of Russia. He then dictates a peace that leaves him supreme in Central and Southern Europe under the guarantee of a Russian alliance.

This new development was like the end of the world to those who thought in terms of modern Europe. But if some time-traveller from fifteen centuries back had made this his first stop, he would have found the whole situation strangely familiar. It was Rome over again, the Rome of the divided empire, of the Eastern and Western Cæsars, for the Tsars were the direct heirs of the Byzantine civilization, and Napoleon had formally signalized his assumption of the Western Empire by abolishing, after just over a thousand years of existence, that Holy Roman Empire which had been the perquisite of Germany. From the Atlantic to the Niemen, from the Baltic flats to the toe of Italy, extended the *imperium* of the new Gallic Cæsar, in a ring of provinces, dependencies, and states, nominally independent but crushed into vassalage.

There was, however, one new and disturbing factor, with which old Rome had never had to reckon, in the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

existence of an independent and hostile British civilization on her flank. So long as that remained unconquered, the new *imperium* was a monstrous unreality, a structure without permanence or safety. It was in the power of Britain, with her inexhaustible resources and her inviolable shores, to wear her enemy down ; to take her own time, to plant her blows at any point she chose of the Continental seaboard, retiring into the blue if they should be parried, beyond the reach of retaliation, and with her wealth perpetually at the disposal of any enemy who might lift his head against Napoleon on land.

And what must have been most maddening of all, these stolid islanders, even when they stood alone against Europe, seemed quite incapable of making heavy weather of it. It is true that the sensitive mind of a Wordsworth could thrill with heroic pride to think that—

“ We are left, or shall be left, alone,
The last that dare to struggle with the foe.”

But we should be greatly mistaken if we imagined this to be the mood of the country as a whole. Once the fear of secret societies and revolution had worn off, it settled down to the even tenor of its life as if there were no such thing as a war on. Newmarket and the Derby continued to be patronized with unabated enthusiasm ; the *hoi polloi* could get more excited over the result of a prize-fight than that of a battle ; hunting was so much a necessity of a gentleman's existence that Lord Wellington must needs hunt his own pack behind the lines in the Peninsula. There have been war-time novels that have become classic, but none surely so remarkable as the six of Miss Jane Austen, depicting the quiet life of the English countryside during this Titanic struggle. For she somehow contrives to forget that there is a war on at all.

Of all opponents the most demoralizing to face is one who can afford to devote only half his attention to a combat *à outrance*. And that was the case with the

“ENGLAND WILL SAVE EUROPE”

English squirearchy, who were in control of the country and its policy.

Foiled at sea, the new Cæsar had one last resource. He would strangle this English trade that was strangling him ; would use his imperial power to organize a complete European boycott of this shopkeeper nation. It was a plan worthy of his genius, or megalomania—this of conquering a Continent in order to blockade an island ; and the strain that it put upon the changing order of English society was cruel, one symptom of it being the sporadic and futile riots of starving factory hands, banded to smash the new machinery that they blamed for the misery of their lot. But it was Napoleon's power and not England's that was the first to snap. There were limits to what even Europe would stand ; to be deprived of freedom might be borne, at a pinch, but to be deprived of access to the great, universal, cheap provider was beyond the limit.

But Napoleon would play the game to the end, even if it were his own end. He would annex the Low Countries entire, the German coast as far as the Baltic, both sides of the Adriatic, and the entire Spanish Peninsula. This last step was far from being a mere act of insane violence. In the logic of empire it was practically inevitable. How could the Western Cæsar, with even Germany at his feet, leave the ancient province of Hispania out of his orbit ? It was merely substituting one Frenchman for another on the throne ; and the Spaniards, a century before, had received with joy the gift of a King from Versailles. Who, without lifelong experience of the Spanish temperament and its dark pride, would have understood what was the fundamental difference in acceptability between a Prince of the Blood, a legitimate heir—bigot and coward though he might be—and worthy Monsieur Joseph Buonaparte ?

To stir up the hornet's nest of Spanish nationalism was to give England her ideal military opening, whereby she could produce the maximum effect on the Continent

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

with the minimum expenditure of force. She had merely to provide a spearhead for the Spanish resistance and she could force her enemy to do the most fatal thing of all for a European dictator—namely to fight on two fronts. For the Eastern front was ready to burst into activity at any moment ; and so long as Napoleon was committed to his great armed boycott of England, the nations that might have settled down contentedly under his sovereignty were kept in a state of perpetually inflamed hostility.

A joyous anthology¹ of the worst poems in the English language quotes a contemporary effort by some lyre-sweeping Colonel, which hits off the truth with a precision that few good poems have excelled :

“Neither the nations of the East, nor the nations of the West
Have thought the thing Napoleon thought was to their
interest,”

which was exactly how the nations of Europe did regard their enforced membership of a dear goods club.

From the time Napoleon first committed himself, beyond the possibility of drawing back, to the Peninsula adventure, it became possible to bleed his empire to death with something like scientific certainty. Left to themselves the Spaniards, whose sole strength lay in guerilla operations, could probably have been worn down by successive concentrations of force. But with a highly efficient British regular army in the field, such concentration was never possible. And the alternative—to concentrate on the British and end that nuisance once for all, was ruled out by sea power. If they were driven to their ships, they would only come back ; and under so faultless a master of this particular game as Wellington proved to be, they could not even be so driven. When it consisted only of a fortified line across the Lisbon Peninsula, the Western Front continued to drain the strength of France as fast as—or faster than—ever.

¹ *The Stuffed Owl*, by D. B. Wyndham Lewis.

“ENGLAND WILL SAVE EUROPE”

Napoleon could rush from Madrid to Vienna, could smite down the power of Austria for the fourth time in a dozen years, could annex more and more provinces—but the very violence of his struggles only drained his strength the faster. He poured more and more men and resources into Spain, without bringing the conquest of that country, or the expulsion of the British, a shade nearer. Three hundred thousand of his best troops represented, from first to last, the tale of those who left their bones in the Peninsula.

The breaking point came with the revival of the Eastern front as Franco-Russian. The Eastern Cæsar had been driven into the quarrel as the direct result of the attempt to boycott Britain, and it was the British incubus that rendered the quarrel fatal to him of the West, who could no longer concentrate on the one enemy but must needs strike into the vast Eastern plain with a heterogeneous horde, less than half French, that not even his genius could forge into an instrument of victory. To raise even that moiety of Frenchmen he had to deplete his Western front below safety point. And this time, with that strange tendency to reproduce the experience of Rome, the new Cæsar found himself faced with the same insoluble problem of the Eastern frontier as had baffled the old. “Scratch a Russian,” he had said, “and you will find a Tartar.” He might have said the eternal Oriental, the Persian or Parthian—the elusive enemy who could not be fought to a decision, and who had a limitless background on which to retire.

He could only stretch his Eastern front precariously and fatally eastward in a war of bayonets against space. And then, when he stood with the remnants of an army amid the ashes of a deserted Moscow, the time had come for both East and West to close in remorselessly upon him like a pair of gigantic pincers, with his conquered or vassal nations abjuring their allegiance as the tide of war overflowed their frontiers, and swelling the odds against him till they became overwhelming,

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

and the momentum of the great Eastern counter-offensive had borne it forward to Paris—while Wellington worked in slowly, but remorselessly, from the West. All the time, the invisible grip of England was on the new Cæsar's throat. All the time, her limitless resources were being converted into driving power for the armies that were crushing the life out of his empire ; the resources of her diplomacy were employed to keep the will of the very mixed combination of allies fixed and implacable to the end. It was Lord Castlereagh who, although only a civilian foreign minister, came to the Allied headquarters and, in England's capacity of universal paymaster, as good as drove them to their final march on Paris.

Thus was the balance of Europe restored and its dictator became the captive of Elba, from whence his return, with the second mobilization of Europe and his final suppression, forms a picturesque epilogue to which there could be only one conclusion. For to the often repeated question "What if Napoleon had won Waterloo?" the only sane reply is that the Hundred Days might, with extraordinary luck, have been doubled. The balance of physical and moral forces against dictatorship was by this time too heavily weighted.

Surveying this twenty-three years' war, from Valmy to Waterloo, we can see that what really decided it was the application, under singularly favourable conditions, and with intuitive constancy, of England's national technique of preventing Europe from ever being united under a single control—ever, that is to say, from consummating the logic of those imperial principles which, since the days of Rome, had never ceased to germinate in its civilization.

Napoleon, and France under his leadership, had come nearer than ever before to creating a complete working model of a state organized on the pure, Totalitarian principle, a state that, so organized, had all but succeeded in achieving a Totalitarian Empire, at least of Western

“ENGLAND WILL SAVE EUROPE”

Europe. And but for the perpetual dislocating factor of English hostility, the thing would appear to have been easily within the scope of his genius and resources. But machine power, invulnerable behind sea power, had brought him down.

But neither machinery, nor wealth, nor arms can avail of themselves ; only the spirit can command victory. And perhaps the most significant feature of the whole contest is how, during its course, the leading roles, those of France and England, come to be reversed. It had started with a coalition of despots frankly out to rivet the ancient chains on a people who had burst them in the determination to be free, and though Fox and his Whig rump had continually protested against Britain's pulling an oar in such a galley, there had been little to distinguish the policy of Mr. Pitt, backed as he was by an overmastering force of patriotic sentiment, from that of the crowned and disreputable crew he was financing with British money. It will be remembered how even the name of Nelson came to be stained indelibly by his libticide complicity with a white terror in Naples, and Pitt himself thought nothing of bargaining away the liberties of the Genoese Republic first to Austria and then to Sardinia.

But the split between a right wing majority for patriotism and divine wrong, against a left wing minority for France and liberty, was ended by the action of France herself, in coming out for imperialism naked and unashamed. When she started bludgeoning out the liberties of free Switzerland, even the most ardent of the young, revolutionary idealists became as anti-French as the stoutest Tory. And the dictatorship of Napoleon and his spectacular attempt at an invasion had the effect of uniting the whole country in a simple and straightforward determination to beat the enemy. While the French were encamped at Boulogne, there was no need to bother about hidden hands or to suspend habeas corpus. And even Fox, who, in brief control of the country's

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

foreign policy, crowned his career by one last desperate attempt at appeasement, spurned the disgraceful terms that were all the enemy was prepared to concede, and, before he closed his eyes forever,

Stood for his country's glory fast
And nailed her colours to the mast.

But the very fact that the home front was now secure and all parties united in a common basis of patriotism made it easier to put patriotism on a true British foundation, instead of what had partly been one of class selfishness and partly a fear-stricken instinct of self-preservation on any terms and by any means. More and more Britain began to discover that her great enemy was only to be foiled by opposing his imperial will with an equal and opposing will to freedom—not freedom in the abstract, for that was never the British way ; but the right of this, that, and the other people to order their affairs in the way *they* chose, and not that which Cæsar chose to dictate. It was as if the principle of Magna Charta had been translated to—

“No free nation shall be taken, or enslaved, or dispossessed, or in any way destroyed, against its will, and contrary to the law of nations.”

And behind this principle lay another, of vital import, namely that nations had a soul and will of their own, and were not just so much property of whoever happened to be their legitimate Sovereign. England had long had such a consciousness about herself ; good King George was a fine old figurehead, and a bit more, but nobody—except possibly good King George himself—seriously thought of him as owning the ship. It is John Bull, a brutal and bucolic figure, who in the popular cartoons of the time roars out invitations to little Napoleon to come and be damned and have his skull cracked ! It was Britannia that ruled the waves.

Moreover, as the combat deepened, John Bull began to discover that his real allies were his own opposite

“ENGLAND WILL SAVE EUROPE”

numbers, and not those of good King George, in other countries. So long as the kings had continued to put up a fight against France, first the Republic and then Napoleon had gone on knocking them down like so many crowned ninespins. It was when the people began to take a hand in the game that the tide of war turned. And England, almost without realizing it, became in practice what Revolutionary France had given herself out as being—the friend and ally of every people fighting for its freedom.

And Britain differed from France in the fact that she was genuinely capable of feeling for other peoples' liberties as well as her own, even if not to the same degree. She had already given plain evidence of having acquired the faculty—the liberties of Hindus and Americans had proved capable of arousing a perfectly disinterested sympathy in English breasts; perhaps it may not be fanciful to say that the beginnings of this too may be found in the Great Charter, in which the feudal magnates are as careful to safeguard the liberties of their subtenants against themselves, as their own against the King. And what other nation, in the height of such a conflict, would have found time or heart to strike the greatest blow hitherto dealt to the slave trade?

The last great, cumulative effort against Napoleon was everywhere essentially an uprising of the peoples, a flood of popular sentiment on the crest of which the Sovereigns were swept along, not always with the best of grace. And to this England everywhere lent a helping hand. As Canning could proclaim, when Foreign Secretary in 1808, every nation that opposed the common enemy of all nations would find an ally in Great Britain. To save Europe—such was the task which even unimaginative Pitt had been inspired to bequeath to her, and one that it fell to his disciple Canning to felicitate her, in the hour of victory, on having fulfilled. It was in no spirit of vainglorious rhetoric that Wordsworth described her in verse as “a bulwark for the cause of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

men", and in prose as "the land of liberty and courage and peace; the land trustworthy and long approved; the central orb to which as a fountain the nations of the earth ought to repair and in their golden urns find light".

This is no doubt the language of a genius and a visionary, but the fact that British patriotism could rise to the height of glorying in its strength to save others, and to maintain other liberties than its own, surely registers an upward stage in the march of human progress, however far, at times, the reality may have lagged behind the ideal, and however dangerous may have been the potentialities of this same popular nationalism whose cause John Bull embraced as that of liberty.

CHAPTER III

REACTIONARY INTERMEZZO

Whatever forces they were that had made England capable of overcoming the greatest threat to European liberty since the fall of Rome, the spirit that had sustained the struggle was that of the landed gentry, the backbone of the Tory Party that had remained in control almost continuously throughout. The rich mercantile interests of the towns, which gravitated towards the Whig side, had been much less certain about holding on to the end, and their enthusiasm for the war was, to say the least of it, lukewarm. But the great army of foxhunters, quartered on the countryside, had continued to stand out for a complete victory, no matter what the odds, because it never had occurred to them that there was any alternative course. And after all, the Continental blockade and the restriction of food imports, whatever it may have done in the way of starving the people, did at least send up the value of land and its produce in a way little calculated to engender war-weariness in its owners.

But it would be merely absurd to talk as if the steadfastness that saved Europe was based on a mere calculation of rent rolls. There was something about it very reminiscent of the spirit of those Roman senators, also landowners, who went about their ordinary business perfectly unmoved, even when Hannibal was at the gates of Rome, and who broke Carthage by sheer refusal to be diverted from their purpose by any vicissitudes in the fortunes of war.

And—what could not be said of Rome—they showed themselves capable of making peace in as magnanimous a spirit as they had waged war. The temptation to

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

exploit the victory to the last farthing and the uttermost square inch of territory is one that few victors have been able to resist. In this case it was more than usually severe, for not only had France systematically used her strength to plunder and tyrannize, but she had rewarded the very lenient terms of peace that had at first been accorded her by returning to her imperial vomit, and starting the war all over again. Add to this that England had incurred a burden of debt, in the process of resisting France, that Napoleon himself believed was enough to crush her ; and that France was proposing to start the peace on a comparatively clean sheet. It can safely be said that with a popular press capable of whipping up patriotic propaganda on twentieth century lines, no government would have dared incur the odium of losing the peace, by deliberately throwing away its own conquests and allowing an enemy, who had shown himself incapable of mercy, to get off with a far easier settlement than he had either the power to exact or the right to expect.

And yet such a settlement is what England not only herself conceded to France, but employed the whole of her weight in the councils of Europe to get conceded. And there is hardly anyone to-day who would question that her forbearance was inspired by a statesmanlike wisdom seldom, if ever, surpassed.

And yet Lord Castlereagh who, as British Foreign Minister, was the prime agent of this policy, and the Duke of Wellington, who helped to carry it to fruition, were both pilloried by their contemporaries as Tory reactionaries of the most unredeemed stamp. Castlereagh, in particular, was assailed in terms that would have been more appropriate to Tiberius or the Pharaoh of Exodus. And now that the pendulum has swung to the other extreme, the tendency has been to sentimentalize Castlereagh in a way that would have puzzled and probably scandalized him more than a little. For even among the Englishmen of his time he was, to put it

REACTIONARY INTERMEZZO

mildly, of the extreme right. For liberty, as such, he had not even lip homage ; and he desired to see nothing better than a Europe peacefully united under its legitimate Sovereigns, working in concert to stabilize that rule of order and privilege that the Revolution had threatened to submerge.

But Castlereagh, whatever his private and political views, was, in the depths of his soul, not only a patriot but, in the highest sense, an English gentleman. This is equally true of Wellington, and it is what, at this most critical time, enabled them to rise above their prejudices, and kept their course true to the English tradition of liberty. They were both, in spite of their Celtic blood, far more liable to be guided by intuition than abstract theory—Castlereagh was notoriously incapable of explaining himself lucidly. But their intuitions were magnanimous and the spirit of England was upon them.

Foreign critics are apt to attribute Satanic cunning to the workings of British statesmanship. It has so often acted as if it were capable of seeing many moves ahead in the game, that it is hard to believe that this foresight—if we can call it that—is entirely subconscious. But it is certain that no statesmen of the time can have grasped how vitally Britain's interests were concerned in conforming to the Christian principle, and setting her old enemy, France, upon her feet again. When Wellington, seizing the psychological moment on the ridge at Waterloo, called for his whole line to advance, he little dreamed that he was ringing down the curtain on the long drama of English-French hostilities. But it was even so. After Napoleon there would be no second French candidate, worth taking seriously, for Cæsar of a new Rome. The danger had shifted to another quarter, and had, even thus early, begun to define itself.

For the great Peace Congress of Vienna, which had met to settle the affairs of Europe, and which Napoleon's return from Elba had so rudely interrupted, had already

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

come within an ace of starting another European war, in which England, France, and Austria would have been fighting shoulder to shoulder for the prime object of preventing the King of Prussia from swallowing up the whole of the neighbouring Kingdom of Saxony, with the backing of Russia, whose part of the bargain it was to absorb the lion's share of a re-enslaved Poland. For Prussia had emerged from her eclipse stronger than ever, with that wonderful toughness and resiliency that was the greatest of her qualities, and prepared to go on, where she had left off, with that ruthless process of adding tract to tract and province to province, until she achieved her first purpose of substituting her own King Stork for the Austrian King Log in the sovereignty of Central Europe. After which. . . .

Before the eyes of the Vienna diplomatists, in that hectic winter during which the eyes of the world saw only a splendid pageant of the victor dynasts, the danger to Europe had taken sudden and startling shape in what was conceivably destined to be its ultimate form, that of an alliance between two kindred systems of tyranny. The spirit of that rule was defined with admirable lucidity by one of the Prussian representatives, von Humboldt, who informed the French plenipotentiary, Talleyrand,

“ Might is right ; we do not recognize the law of nations to which you have appealed.”

The danger passed as quickly as it had arisen ; Prussia was convinced, by the only argument capable of convincing a Prussian, that this particular way was, for the moment, barred ; and with her customary resourcefulness she solaced herself with other German pickings in the West that, as it turned out, put her in an even better way towards attaining her goal.

That Castlereagh or any other English statesman was capable of seeing so far into the future as to realize consciously whither all this was tending, is not to be believed, though to a not inconceivably far-sighted observer it might have been apparent, even then, that

REACTIONARY INTERMEZZO

a Cæsar in the centre of Europe, with the great German people united behind him, would constitute an even more formidable proposition than one placed in so lopsided a position as Napoleon had been. But instinct and tradition caused him to act for all the world as if he had known what the future had in store. He who had done more than anyone else to make the fight against French domination one to a finish, was ready not only to keep France from being either plundered or humiliated, but, if need be, to switch over to alliance with her against England's most powerful allies of the late war. And Wellington, fresh from embracing Blucher on the field of victory, had no sooner arrived in Paris than he was bending all his energies to restrain the Prussians from employing, in the conquered territory, what a later generation would know as methods of frightfulness.

The terms that Britain eventually conceded, on her own behalf, were so moderate that Napoleon, who judged by very different standards, could only account for them by assuming Castlereagh to have been so crassly ignorant that he could not even find, on the map, the possessions Britain let slip through her fingers. She might have had Hamburg, as a gateway to King George's Hanover. The whole of the Dutch East Indies could have been hers for the asking ; the French colonial empire was in her occupation. She refused all these temptations, contenting herself with one or two islands, selected with scientific forethought on her imperial communications, and the Dutch settlement at the Cape, which she purchased from its owners at a fair price. It was little regarded at the time that the world's sixth continent, that of Australia, had fallen unperceived into British hands, because monopoly of sea-power had left no one else to occupy it, and because it happened to form a useful dumping ground for the refuse of society.

Such compensation for a forbearance difficult to parallel in the records of victory she neither counted on, nor regarded. Statesmanship like Castlereagh's looked

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

beyond the snatch and grab takings of power politics to a settlement of Europe that should endure on a basis of mutual consent, and by eliminating the excuse for future wars. And it had the thorough backing of the ruling class that Castlereagh represented. There was not the least pressure put upon him in the interests of a narrow patriotism. The gentlemen of England may have been, and were, fatally incapable of reading the signs of their times, but in framing this peace it can at least be said of them that they nothing common did nor mean—and little that was unwise.

We may go farther, and say that such pressure as there was on Castlereagh was in the way not of interest, but the highest principle. Public opinion in England was less excited about the spoils of war, than in its determination to get the evil of slavery put down as quickly as possible. For this it was ready to make real sacrifices, and to insist on its statesmen making them. And England's apparently quixotic readiness to forgo her own gains did give her a bargaining power that she used with decisive effect on behalf of the unhappy blacks. And the good name that comes, not often, to nations that are strong enough to be disinterested, is in itself an asset not to be despised.

And now the great question was whether the settlement of Europe, arrived at with so much difficulty, could be put on a permanent footing. On the Continent, the experience of a generation of war, fought with the whole national resources and not merely by professional armies, had engendered a desire to avoid these horrors in the future at almost any price ; and added to this was the determination of those who had either property or privilege at stake, to maintain the social system that now, at last, appeared to have been restored to something like its pre-revolutionary calm.

Here was a plain case for reconstituting, on a new basis, that ideal of a united Christendom which had been shattered at the Reformation. The obvious agents for such a plan were the Sovereigns of Europe, whose

REACTIONARY INTERMEZZO

common interest in maintaining the peace might have been expected to outweigh even their inherited acquisitiveness at each other's expense, and who, in their struggle against a common enemy, had at least acquired the habit of working in common. And, indeed, such an attempt was made, with apparently the fairest prospects of success. The famous statement of common principle known as the Holy Alliance may have been no more than verbiage to most of its signatories, but if that is so, it is the measure of their short-sightedness. A holy alliance was at least a better and saner thing than an unholy discord of egotism.

But any plan for organizing perpetual peace is bound to come up against one fundamental difficulty. For there is a peace of death no less than of life, and the mark of death is stability. A peace that stops growth—such a peace as that of empire—may be more deadly than war. And therefore he who would earn the blessing pronounced on peacemakers must know how to make peace dynamic.

After this knowledge the Sovereigns of the Holy Alliance did not aspire. They had the imperial tradition in their blood, and their idea of a peaceful Europe was that of an empire in which order was imposed and stabilized from above by a board of local Cæsars, co-ordinating their policy in periodical congresses.

That England would ever be induced to form part of such a system was sheerly unthinkable. That she could even tolerate it was scarcely to be believed by anyone who understood the drift of her policy since she had tacitly resigned membership of European civilization. The Holy Alliance was merely bringing back Rome by a more indirect route than that of Napoleon ; and, in fact, the most promising scheme for arresting the decline of the old empire had been Diocletian's, of just such a board of Cæsars ¹ working in concert.

The stages in the programme could easily be foreseen ;

¹ I borrow the expression from Mr. G. P. Baker's classic *Twelve Centuries of Rome*.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

first the ruthless suppression everywhere of all those tendencies towards popular sovereignty, and democratic nationalism, that had been engendered during the late European upheaval ; next, the reduction, by dint of armed patronage, of the host of petty Cæsars to the status of provincial deputies for the two or three great imperial chiefs ; and—what the experience of Rome had shown to be the end of the chapter—the contest between these final partners for supreme directorship.

England's part in this is both peculiar and significant. Her governing class was in the very trough of reaction, and among the champions of reaction Castlereagh stood forth, with a sinister conspicuousness, in the nation's eye. This reputation he was at no pains to belie, either in word or deed. He was, besides, next to William III, of all British statesmen the most sincerely possessed of the desire to be a good European. His had been the moving and binding spirit of the great Quadruple Alliance that had crushed Napoleon, and it would have been the crown of his achievement to convert that alliance, become Quintuple with the addition of a converted France, into an instrument for keeping the peace that it had made.

But he was the representative of England ; the hand of England was upon him, and the force of English opinion constrained him. Adapting himself as a diplomatist needs must to the circumstances of an unfolding situation, he becomes the *saboteur*, whose spanner, dropped into the delicate machinery that he himself had designed, prepared the way for its irreparable breakdown.

This is no place to unravel the windings of that intricate diplomacy. For that nothing less will suffice than the authoritative treatises of Professors Webster and Temperley on the respective foreign policies of Castlereagh and his successor, Canning. It is not proposed to compress the story told in those many hundred pages into two or three, but merely to point out what the effect of England's action on the development of the European drama was, on the longest possible view, and how inevitably it was

REACTIONARY INTERMEZZO

determined by those principles of her own civilization that, like her Constitution, were the result of no conscious planning, but sprang up, like the sap of her native oak, from roots thrust far beneath the light of day.

Let it be faced that there are two sharply contrasting aspects in which Britain's part may be regarded. She may claim, with justice, to have saved Europe from one of the most insidious conspiracies against its liberty ever framed, and to have done this without firing a shot—except against the Turk in the Bay of Navarino—or even provoking what, in the only too familiar language of our own day, would be described as a crisis. But on the other hand her action and influence did undoubtedly wreck the most promising scheme, since the breaking of Catholic unity, to set up an effective league of nations or sovereignties, capable of maintaining a rule of law and peace over all its members, and with force enough at its disposal to bring any lawbreaker to book. Whether European unity was a thing worth securing at any price—and such a price—is a matter on which opinions may differ. But there can hardly be two opinions among Englishmen.

It was certainly Castlereagh who, by calculated obstruction, prevented the government of Europe by Congresses from getting itself established permanently. His successor, Canning, was possessed of a far more brilliant and incisive personality, though he may have lacked Castlereagh's deep-seated reserves of moral strength. But Canning was as lucid in exposition as Castlereagh was obscure, and he was not under the least illusion about wanting to be a good European. In international politics he was a grand and uncompromising anarchist. "Every nation for itself, and God for us all," was his self-chosen motto; but whatever the Deity may have been, Canning was not for all, but for one: "for 'Alliance' read 'England' and you have the clue of my policy." But the very fact of his being for England put him on the side of liberty, in the English sense—that liberty

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

of every individual to mind his own lawful business, without interference from his neighbours, even in an official capacity. The idea of the great Powers constituting themselves a combined vigilance committee and police force, with a mandate to order everyone's affairs for his (or their) own good, and shoot down anyone who objected, was frankly abhorrent to him ; he would and did fight it with every means at his disposal.

And, like Castlereagh before him, he did so with an almost faultless adjustment of means to ends, never venturing on direct opposition except when in a position to do so with decisive effect. Where the Holy Allies could bring their land power directly to bear, Britain could merely register her disapproval ; only where it was possible to use her command of the sea, did her opposition become active. It was in this sense that Canning embarked on his daring and far-sighted scheme of calling the new world into existence to redress the balance of the old, by aiding and abetting the United States to preserve American soil inviolate from the imperialism of Europe. Having thus countered what was the most serious threat of all, that of the extension of Holy Alliance methods to the Western Hemisphere, he proceeded to vindicate the liberties of small nations, Greece and Portugal, by direct action based on sea power.

What is most significant of all about this most important phase of British action on Europe is that it is in the deepest and truest sense that of Britain herself, and that these two great statesmen, her foreign ministers, were merely the interpreters and agents of her wishes. Both Castlereagh and Canning were keenly sensitive to public opinion at home, but in different ways. To Castlereagh, that reserved aristocrat, it was a spur ; he yielded to it, as to *force majeure* ; he would have scorned to solicit it. Canning, who was a self-made man, not only responded to public opinion, but eagerly courted it. He was a patriot in the grand style of identifying himself with the spirit, and not only the interests, of his country. It was

REACTIONARY INTERMEZZO

because he thought nobly of her that he could draw out in unforgettable phrases what was noblest in her. As—to take what is perhaps the loftiest flight of all—“We go to plant the standard of England on the well-known heights of Lisbon. Where that standard is planted, foreign dominion shall not come.”

In the dozen years that intervened between Waterloo and the death of Canning, England had followed her achievement of saving Europe from a French dictatorship, by one of hardly less importance. By a strategy of dislocation she had wrecked the attempt to replace one Cæsar by a board of Cæsars. The fourth of the European Congresses, after Vienna, that of Verona in 1822, was the last. The Holy Alliance was not killed, so much as narrowed down into what we should now call an Axis, or anti-democratic bloc, of the three great reactionary Houses of Hapsburg, of Romanoff, and of Hohenzollern, united together by participation in the fruits, and attendant perils, of that great international crime called the Partition of Poland. But the axis was not without its own elements of friction, and there was an equal chance for the opposite ideology to grow up in countries outside its control. England's action had secured at least a fair field for liberty, in a Europe where this might be supposed to have the future on its side. And from England's lower standpoint, it had once again dispelled her nightmare of being brought face to face with a united Continent—Rome over again.

This had been done during what is generally, and with reason, spoken of, even in English History, as the time of reaction. The Tory gentry remained all the time in complete control of Parliament and the State machinery, and more obsessed than ever with a fear of revolution that had come to be more and more the same thing as fear of change. And yet it is the astonishing fact that England, under such auspices, was not only capable of defeating the great reactionary conspiracy on the Continent, but of effecting from within that peaceful surrender

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

of power by her governing class, that was the only real way of averting revolution.

For the fall of the ancient regime in France, though it had not brought the guillotine and the Terror to England, had affected that class in a way more subtle, but hardly less damaging, by depriving it of the civilizing influence that had emanated from the court at Versailles. While that had endured, France had been an enemy indeed, in the political sense, but without ever ceasing to be what Sidney had called her—"that sweet enemy," a pattern and an inspiration. For in those days it was beneath the dignity of an educated man to lash himself up into a blind fury of hatred against any nation whose political interests happened to conflict with those of his own.

All that had been changed by the French Revolution. War had ceased to be an affair of gentlemen, and had become a conflict of civilizations. Anything French had come to be hateful in itself to patriotic Britons ; even an excess of politeness had come to be suspect as "French polish". The English upper class had come positively to glory in its insularity, and, like Kipling's recruit, in refusing to obey any orders except they were its own.

There was no sudden or revolutionary change ; the English gentleman did not wake up one October morning in 1789, and find himself a barbarian. The class that could produce a Shelley and a Byron, and find such leadership as that of a Wellington and a Castlereagh, might well be supposed capable of generating its own culture, without foreign assistance. Its vital energy was unimpaired ; but now there was nothing to give it direction, no power of civilized co-ordination. Every man struck out for himself the line that seemed right in his own eyes ; it was a time of magnificent eccentrics ; the Elizabethan age had produced no richer harvest of adventurers in every field. But, as bad money drives out good, so it would seem that the lower elements in human nature,

REACTIONARY INTERMEZZO

left to to its own resources, will come to the top. Anarchy without culture degenerates into barbarism. And in the 1820's, after the death of Byron, the barbarization of the English gentry is no longer to be concealed. Less and less does its energy tend to seek intellectual outlet. The life in the great country houses is one prolonged orgy of animal spirits ; exuberant virility, or manliness, is the crown of all virtues, and there is no mode of human existence counted superior to that which alternated between sport by day stimulated by gambling, and conviviality by night stimulated by alcohol. The Horace Walpoles, the Gibbons, and the Chesterfields are gone, leaving no successors ; even the great eccentrics have become standardized characters.

Thus it comes about that after having worn down Napoleon by a not ignoble persistency, the governing class is found more and more manifestly incapable of dealing with the even more exacting social problem that the peace offers for solution. Here the quality that had won the war was rather worse than useless ; what was required was the capacity for facing a situation in process of revolutionary change, an intellectual and imaginative courage of a very different order from the mere incapacity to know when one is beaten.

But this was the very last thing that my lords and gentlemen possessed. At a time when nothing less than creative genius could have served, they were, as a class, in steady process of de-intellectualizing themselves. That the whole social system was being transformed without plan or direction ; that enormous towns were springing up round the new centres of machine power like—what Will Cobbett called them—wens, wherein a new populace of machine hands was teeming* and proliferating under conditions of inhuman degradation—such facts had hardly begun to penetrate the thick skulls of the squirearchy. They were far removed from their experience ; among the happy hunting grounds of the shires and the spacious park lands of Kent, there was hardly more knowledge of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Salford or the Black Country than there was of Timbuktu. And when the news arrived of mobs of rough men, smashing machines and defying all constituted authority, the effect on the governing class was to revive, in an acute form, its terror of revolution. Its instinctive reaction was to strengthen the hands of the State in maintaining the reign of law against anarchy. But to remove the causes of anarchy instead of driving it below the surface, to substitute cosmos for chaos in the social system, this does not even seem to have struck them as a possibility. Weighed in the balances of a new age, they were found wanting. As Cromwell might have said,

“ You have been here too long for any good you have been doing lately. . . . In the name of God, go ! ”

But that was just the question—what was to shift them ? For the Constitution appeared to provide no remedy. Owing, largely, to the complete stagnation of the war-time years, it had come to be regarded as no longer in process of growth, but rather as a divinely inspired and perfectly finished product, on which it would be sacrilege to lay even improving hands. Parliament was no longer the jury of the nation, but an impudent misrepresentation of what the nation had come to be under the conditions of the new age. But, since Parliament was legally almighty, there appeared to be no lawful remedy except by the class in possession accomplishing its own happy dispatch.

Here was about the severest test to which that impalpable thing which we have called the spirit of England could have been put. For unless this solid Tory majority, obsessed as we have seen with the fear of change and glorying in its obstinacy, could be induced to make the great surrender of its own accord, one of two things must certainly have come to pass : either a revolutionary explosion of the forces driven below the surface, or else a perpetuation of the existing oligarchy by what could only develop into a tyranny of martial

REACTIONARY INTERMEZZO

law. In either case it would have been an end of the Constitution, and an end of England itself—so far as England's truth to herself and her past was concerned.

Here, again, I shall not attempt to re-tell an oft-told story, of how the genius of the Constitution, and the innate reasonableness of the British character, did succeed in finding a way out of an almost impossible situation ; how, in spite of rotten boroughs and all the complication of electoral anomalies, an appeal to the country returned to the unreformed House of Commons a smashing majority pledged to a root and branch reform of the whole system ; and how the great Duke himself, whose pride it had been never in his whole military career to have sacrificed so much as a gun, led his solid Tory majority of Peers into the most signal capitulation in the whole of political history, a surrender that to many of them signified opening the floodgates to revolution.

It was not the first or last time that it had been proved that, as nature abhors a vacuum, so does British nature abhor a deadlock, and will contrive, at almost any sacrifice of consistency, to find a way out of it. There had been one occasion when English parties had gone to all lengths rather than compromise on a matter of political principle, and that experience of regicide and military tyranny had been more than enough for John Bull. Come what might, there must be no breach of national continuity—"the King's government," as Wellington put it, "must be carried on." Which was only another way of recognizing that, in an age of steam power, he who sits on the national safety valve is expected to rise before pressure increases to bursting point.

But in Wellington's own idiom, it was a "damned near run thing". It is hardly possible to imagine a country more apparently on the brink of revolution than during the last stages of Tory resistance to the great Reform Bill. Mob violence had already broken out in unrestrained terrorism in Bristol and Nottingham ; and what was far more alarming, the proletariat in the new industrial

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

districts was organized, and even arming, in political unions that only waited the word of command to

“ Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number.”

Even Wellington, the national hero, was in imminent danger of his life as he rode through the streets of London on the anniversary of Waterloo. And a threat that might have been more deadly to the existing social order than any other, was that of a deliberately organized run on the banks.

The train was laid—but not fired. The word of revolutionary command was never issued ; the working class leaders were more concerned to prevent than to incite a rising ; the run on the banks never materialized. Nobody—at least nobody who mattered—seriously meditated revolution. What they did want was to make it perfectly plain to the Duke, and the Tories, that the time had come when, as Walpole had once put it, “ This dance will no further go.” Any sensible Englishman—or Anglo-Irishman for that matter—can be relied on to understand when his position has become impossible. To hang on in teeth of the plainly expressed will of the country is to violate the great national taboo of “ It is not done ”.

This every Englishman knows, and those who staged the demonstration of revolutionary force, being Englishmen themselves, knew that the Duke knew it ; knew also that an English governing class, bone-headed as it might be, would accept notice to quit without waiting to be evicted.

The spirit of England had once again triumphed over repression. There would be no petrification and no explosion—she would go on growing.

CHAPTER IV

CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE

The fifteen years after Waterloo had marked the obscure transition between an old regime that had not abdicated, and a new that had not entered into formal possession. It was only when the collapse of the restored Bourbon dynasty in France, during the July days of 1830, started an epidemic of revolutionary upheavals, that the fundamental change in the European situation, and consequent regrouping of national forces, came to be revealed.

For now the decision of the Napoleonic wars could be judged in clearer perspective. It was not, as the peacemakers at Vienna had fondly imagined, that divine right and the ancient regime should be standardized as the norm of civilized society, but rather that the bid of one particular nation, France, for the empire at least of Western Europe, had been ruled out of practical possibility. It might take some fresh experience to expunge the idea finally from the French mind, but the fact had come to stay—namely, that whatever Cæsar Europe might or might not be destined to have, would not be a French Cæsar.

It was a fact that, once it came to be realized, revolutionized the whole relationship between Britain and France. So long as there was any serious question of France upsetting the Balance of Power, and making herself mistress of the Continent, it was the British part, for dear life, to oppose her. But now that the danger, if not yet precisely localized, had shifted Eastward, there was reason, not less cogent, for the two Powers standing together against the Holy Alliance of armed and co-operative despotisms, and its system of organized

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

repression that took its name from its grand contriver, Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor.

Even under the reactionary Bourbons the force of this new attraction was beginning to be felt, for France had a constitution, and, what was more, an extremely well informed and militant public opinion that was nourished on the memories of the Revolution, and had had quite enough, from Napoleon, of the sort of police inquisition that Metternich was imposing on Central Europe. Thus we find England and France standing together on behalf of Greek independence against the Turks, which, as Metternich himself recognized, was a test case of rebellion against a legitimate, though infidel, Sovereign. Here was a phenomenon inconceivable in the eighteenth century—the beginning of an *entente cordiale*, based on common ideals.

There was just a moment when it looked as if this might have been a false dawn ; as if reaction were about to triumph in France, and—under Wellington—even in England. But the people in both countries had their say, and after the revolutionary disturbances had died down, and normal conditions were restored, it became evident that, however else they might differ, England and France were united on the most important question of all, that of belief in representative principles of government. But if it would have been premature to refer to them as the democratic, it would at least have been no misnomer to have christened them the Liberal Powers. And from this a Liberal *entente* was an almost necessary consequence.

It is, indeed, a new Europe that is taking shape in this fourth decade of the nineteenth century, and one of which the changed orientation is already becoming defined. Everywhere west of the Rhine and south of the Alps the Metternich system holds ; the forces of reaction are completely triumphant. In England and France it is just the other way about ; we have constitutional governments whose very existence is a new Protestantism against

CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE

the orthodoxy of the Holy Alliance, a damnable and defiant heresy, though a crusade to bring them back to the fold is, at present, out of the question.

The new entente was soon to be put to the test in the matter of Belgium, which at the peace Britain—wavering in this solitary instance from her championship of freedom—had made a vital point of including in a kingdom of the United Netherlands, by way of forming a buffer state against French aggression. Belgium, catching the infection from Paris, had upset this scheme by proclaiming her independence and going Liberal. And Belgium, it will be remembered, was the point in all Europe on which England was most sensitive, and which had been at the root of almost every one of the numerous wars she had fought with France since the Middle Ages. And with the French public in the first enthusiasm of the new regime clamouring for the support and even annexation of Belgium, another of these wars seemed plainly indicated.

But, in fact, nothing of the sort eventuated. Statesmanship proved capable of adapting itself to the circumstances of a new Europe, in which old rivalries had given place to new. The new Whig Government in England had, in a fortunate hour, committed the seals of the Foreign Office to Lord Palmerston, a disciple of Canning, with perhaps even more than Canning's flair for standing forth in the eyes of his countrymen as the champion of the British spirit and tradition—none the less the thoroughly representative Englishman for the Irish streak in his composition, and for all his ostentatiously aggressive John Bullishness, a consummate diplomatic technician. He, like his French *vis-à-vis*, the aged Talleyrand, long securely established as the diplomatic genius of his age, was capable of seeing that the real Belgian danger was one that threatened both their countries alike—and came from the East. Were the Powers of the Holy Alliance going to force back this latest joined nation into their orbit, and quench the fire of liberty here as they were doing right up to the frontiers of Russia,

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

and as no diplomacy could have stopped them doing, had not their bloody task of re-enslaving Poland diverted their forces and attention at the critical moment? The respite afforded was seized by the two Foreign Ministers in a way that was worth more to their respective countries than many victories, and the result of their co-operation was not only to avert a suicidal war, but to serve as a model for Franco-British relations for any of their successors who might be wise enough to copy it.

Here was a complete reversal of the state of things that had obtained in the eighteenth century. Then England and France had been in a state of chronic political antagonism, but England had looked to France as the fountain-head of European culture, a culture essentially aristocratic. Now, though there was to be frequent and sometimes dangerous friction between the two countries, their tradition of antagonism was broken; when in future they made war together, it would be as allies. But culture had ceased to be aristocratic, and there was no question of England looking to France as her exemplar in anything less superficial than the fashions of female attire or the writing of menus. The tendency was now rather for France to take her lead from British civilization, and of a repetition on the spiritual plane of what had happened during the latter part of the Middle Ages, when it had been a question of whether England could make good a partial conquest.

For we must consider the change that had come over the very notion of civilization at the dawn of this period that in England is called Victorian, though it really begins with the reign of Victoria's uncle, William IV. In both countries the centre of the picture is no longer, as it is on the canvas of Nattier or Sir Joshua, an aristocratic figure. But still less is it that of the sansculotte, the proletarian in his red cap of liberty. When we think of the early Victorian time in England or that of Louis Philippe in France, what sort of figure does our imagination instinctively conjure up? In France it would not be

CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE

very different from that of the King himself, conspicuous not by the sceptre, but the umbrella, matching in expansiveness his whiskers, his frock coat, his top hat, and everything about him, wherewith he would stump the streets of Paris like the substantial bourgeois whose part he designed to play in the eyes of his subjects. In England it would be an even more substantial figure, the very pink or—one would be more inclined to say—black of commercial respectability, the kind that forms a solid backbone to the most fantastic extravagances of Dickens.

Or, perhaps, if we try to recapture the spirit of that age in its purest essence, we shall not think of any human figure, but of the great cylinder hat that everybody, from the Prince Consort down to Bill Sikes, felt under a mysterious compulsion to put on, and which gentlemen of fashion claimed the privilege of retaining even in the smoking rooms of their clubs—a helmet of respectability, covering a multitude of sins and adding enough to a man's stature for him to face the world unshamed. The eighteenth century was capable of representing the Deity in a wig ; it is a pity that no Victorian ever had the frankness to depict what he called the Lord in the only conceivable headgear.

The Reform Bill settlement, that second Glorious Revolution *à la Anglaise*, turned out ludicrously different from what its opponents had feared, or its extreme supporters had hoped. Those political unions of the workers, the threat of whose direct action had daunted even Wellington, discovered that victory had brought them rather less than nothing. They had merely pulled the chestnuts out of the fire for the bosses, and installed a new governing class, who were, on the whole, inclined to play King Stork to their predecessors' Log. There were cases in which workers had actually lost the vote they had enjoyed by the old happy-go-lucky system, nor was the sweated Lancashire mill-hand or Welsh miner likely to be included among the newly enfranchised

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

four hundred thousand, above the ten-pound householder limit.

No wonder that the disillusioned workers tried to work a second revolution on their own account, of the sort they had imagined the first was going to be, and took the authentic British way of formulating a new Great—or People's—Charter, based on a complete democratic franchise, and anticipating, in all but the detail of annual Parliaments, just such a regime as Englishmen of all classes, in the twentieth century, have come to accept as a matter of course. Not so the Whig beneficiaries of the Reform Bill! *Their* answer to the Charter was what King John's would have been, had he possessed strength to make it good. And left to themselves, against the united money, brain, military, and police power of the minority in possession, the workers were helpless. It did, indeed, seem at one time as if a rising might have been attempted—but it only needed a liberal-minded general to take the men's leaders into his confidence, and give them ocular demonstration of the military force at his disposal, to nip it in the bud.

As late as the year of European Revolutions, 1848, a much advertised final attempt to carry the Charter produced a middle class mobilization, in London, of such overwhelming strength as to submerge the Charter and its remaining promoters under a flood of ridicule. The middle class electorate was confirmed in unquestioned sovereignty, until such time as it chose to abdicate of its own accord—and, in less than twenty years from the final collapse of the Charter, it did choose.

Looking back upon it now, we can see little reason to regret this slowing up of democratic progress. To have made over the keys of power to the illiterate, brutalized, and half-starved proletariat of the new towns, which had not yet risen perceptibly above the level of the eighteenth century mob, would have been, to put it very mildly, premature.

If—as I trust I have shown cause for believing—

CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE

the all-important thing was to preserve the continuity of the English tradition, the pause of a few decades to consolidate an advance already made, and to prepare for the next, would seem to have been no less than necessary. The trusteeship of civilization was not unworthily committed to that section of the community which was alone capable of taking it over, and which, in spite of all its shortcomings, approved itself by the very fact that none even of its promoters ever dreamed of regarding the Reform Bill settlement as final. The only serious question was how soon, and to what extent, it would be safe to consider the people lawfully of age to assume responsibility for the management of its own affairs.

For a temporary solution, this one of a middle class sovereignty was plainly dictated by circumstances. Where else was the capacity of leadership, in a time of headlong transition, to be found? No longer in a gentry, fast degenerating towards the cultivated mindlessness of 100 per cent sportsmanship; not yet in a populace with hardly a thought to spare from the daily business of keeping soul and body together. It would be hardly too gross an exaggeration to talk of the brains and driving power of early Victorian civilization as the property of its bourgeoisie.

Naturally such a term as middle class does not admit of rigid definition, least of all in England, where, in the strict sense, there are no classes at all. But everybody knows enough for practical purposes what that class, or group of classes, consists of, which comprehends at one end of the scale, wealthy capitalists like the Ruskins, Gladstones, and Brownings, and at the other those who, like the elder Dickens, just manage to scrape along the edge of respectability. Dickens himself has given us its anatomy and portrait gallery, from Pickwick and Podsnap at the one, to Cratchit and Swiveller at the other extreme.

That the dominant motive of the early Victorian age should resemble that of a Dickens novel is no isolated or accidental phenomenon. Balzac, in his gigantic *Human*

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Comedy, has given as complete a survey of the French as Dickens of the English scene. And though that drama consists of many separate stories, and includes many hundreds of characters, it achieves unity from its hero being always the same, all-mastering power to which its author never attaches a name, but which Milton personified as Mammon,

the least erected spirit that fell
From heaven,

which did not prevent him from doing wonders as architect contractor down below.

For the society which Balzac depicts is one wholly absorbed in the struggle for monetary survival, one in which the financially strongest push the delicate and sensitive ruthlessly to the wall, and in which genius itself must needs prostitute its soul to the reigning deity.

It is small wonder that, in the storm and stress of mechanical revolution, society should have become money-ridden; though what we here mean by money is not so much stamped metal as the disembodied power behind the machinery, that to which the new political economy was beginning to refer as capital. It was a power whose nature was still all too imperfectly comprehended, and that no one, except one or two eccentric theorists, had the remotest notion of controlling. The tendency was rather to worship it as a sort of abstract fetish, and accord it perfectly free play in the faith that, left to itself, it would go on multiplying wealth at such a rate as to compensate for whatever human sacrifice might be involved in the process.

What we have called the middle class may then, from the most exalted city magnate to the humblest clerk, be regarded as a vast priesthood devoted to the service of this as yet unknown god, whose cult certain heretics of its own membership—notable among them Thomas Carlyle—were already beginning to blaspheme as devil worship. And its supremacy represents the final triumph

CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE

of money power over the land power that had been the strength of feudalism.

Patriots of the old school, like the Duke of Wellington, can hardly be blamed for the alarm with which the prospect inspired them. For it was a desperately hazardous experiment to anyone without foreknowledge of the event. The power of the landed gentry had its roots in the soil ; long after they had ceased to lead their people to battle, they continued to act as administrators and judges of their own localities, and to organize the all-important activity of raising food from the soil. They could not transfer the land to another county or country by an entry in some banker's ledger. There was always a squire at the Hall who, like the King, never died. And whatever faults it had committed, that class could render at least a plausible account of its stewardship—the fighting services officered ; worldwide expansion pioneered ; the country saved from starvation and tided over one peril of conquest from without and revolution from within during a time of supreme trial—these were assets substantial enough to outbalance a good many incidental liabilities.

But this intangible and fluid element of capital—what solid foundations did that afford for patriotism to build upon ? The soil of the country was saturated with tradition, and carried responsibilities from which its ownership could not lightly be divorced ; but what responsibility attached to the ownership of one of the new factories, except that of underselling competitors in a desperate competition of all against all, by cutting down working expenses, including the wage bill, to a minimum, and sweating the last unit of energy out of employees with less concern for their welfare than any intelligent slaveholder, since it might pay better to use them up in relays than to waste good money in prolonging the working, or physical, life of individuals. But even such ownership had a certain tangibility compared with that disembodied abstraction of power represented by

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

investment, particularly when, as after 1862, the adoption of limited liability had eliminated the last responsibilities of partnership.

It was an utter transformation of life that the coming of the new machine power was effecting, with all the old landmarks in process of being submerged ; nor was it any wonder that when the passing of the Reform Bill based political power on this new foundation, so abstract and inhuman, fears should have been raised lest old England herself should be on the verge of dissolution, like a body parted from its soul.

Any such doubts only the event could dispel, and it soon became apparent that whatever else might have changed, the spirit of British civilization was destined to endure, with a vitality stronger than ever under its middle class or—if we may call it so—capitalist sovereignty.

The notion of this class as a sort of closed corporation, running the State in its own interest, and according to a conscious plan of campaign, is one of those monstrous abstractions that reduce history to the level of propagandist fiction. The real story has none of these hard and inhuman outlines, least of all in England, where anybody has the privilege of dubbing himself esquire, and where even nobility has its price in the market.

And yet, to cut the Prince of Denmark out of *Hamlet* would be no more fatuous than to think of this time between the two years of revolution, 1830 and 1848, in any other light than that of the great bid for middle class supremacy in Western Europe, a bid that, had it been successful, would have meant that British civilization had effected something like a spiritual conquest of the mainland. For the middle class ideal was almost as necessarily British born, as that of an aristocratic culture had radiated from the Sun King, and his successors, at Versailles. For just as there had been no aristocracy to hold a candle to that of pre-revolutionary France, so now the British bourgeoisie easily outdistanced that of any other nation in wealth, in numbers, and in power.

CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE

It was only to be expected in a nation that had obtained such an enormous start over its rivals in the mechanization of its industry, that the class whose function it was to organize and staff that transformation should have reached a stage of development correspondingly more advanced than anything attained in others.

About those sympathetic revolutions against the Holy Alliance, or Metternich, principle of armed despotism, that broke out at the beginning of the 1830's, we cannot fail to observe how their success is in exact proportion to the strength of the bourgeoisie in their respective countries. Thus in France, Belgium, and England there eventuates a Western group of governments based on strong middle class support and inspired by principles of constitutional liberalism ; but elsewhere, where there is no such weight in the centre, the soldiers and police are able to rivet their chains on the people more firmly than ever.

To put it in the most up-to-date terms, a despotic axis was facing a constitutional *bloc*. As yet the axis was by no means securely forged, nor the *bloc* united by more than the frailest bond of common sympathy. The relation between England and France might have been described as that of an *entente* subject to continual interruption. Had the French King of the bourgeois regime, Louis Philippe, been capable of holding a straight course, had England and France been capable of putting first things first and common principles before jarring interests, how different might have been the course of history !

For on an intelligent calculation, it must have seemed as if the constitutional cause were decisively in the ascendant during these most critical years. The Metternich technique was one of naked repression—the revolutionary fires were nowhere quenched, but continued to smoulder beneath the surface. The Leagued Despots were like men living on a volcano, or sitting on bayonets. Sooner or later, whatever else happened, their regime of force was doomed to collapse, and then would come the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

chance for the rival ideology to capture the soul of an emancipated Europe.

What our modern age is most inclined to see in that bourgeois regime of a century ago has been set forth, in its own inimitable way, by the pencil of Sir Max Beerbohm. Here, in the foreground, we behold an enormously fat French deputy, with perhaps a suggestion of the Premier Guizot, orating from a monstrous scroll into vacancy, while behind him a John Bull, in hard-faced concentration, bows over his office desk driving an indefatigable quill. All this—and more also too grim for laughter—is to be reckoned on the debit side of the balance. And yet when the worst has been said, nothing can alter the fact that at the parting of European ways, these drab and hard-faced individuals were striving towards a goal that would have been one of peace and, at least, of material prosperity.

To unite the world in bonds of love had been the aim of Christianity, an infinitely noble ideal, but one that had made uncommonly little practical headway in nineteen centuries. The new gospel which, in its purest orthodoxy, was fathered by the high, commercial priesthood of the English Manchester School, envisaged a world united in bonds of mutual self-interest by a free exchange of goods and services, since, whether you love your neighbour or not, you and he have more to gain by doing good to each other, in the way of business, than evil, by dint of the sword.

And it was not to Christianity that this bourgeois evangel stood opposed, half so much as to another faith that, unexpectedly enough, breaks to the surface in one of Wordsworth's grandest sonnets to the effect that

“ennobling thoughts depart
When men change swords for ledgers.”

Nations, in this view, rank as the units most highly organized for that supreme activity of which trade is a phase, policy the instrument, and peace the preparation

CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE

—namely war. Already, in Germany, General Clausewitz was at work formulating the doctrine of the nation in arms, and Herr Professor List that of economic nationalism, or the protectionist state militant. And as plain English Mr. Herbert Spencer who, though he belongs to the second half of the century, raised the standpoint of the early Victorian bourgeoisie to the level of universal philosophy, saw with all the lucidity of his one track mind, the future of mankind lay between this blood and iron way of compulsory association, and that which he christened industrial, the State organized on a basis of maximum freedom for a free exchange of goods and services. Peace on earth and good business amongst men ! Not, perhaps, quite the golden rule, but a marked improvement on the iron one.

If the proof of the pudding is the eating—and that in the most literal sense—the Victorians, under their middle class regime, would seem to have furnished it in overflowing measure. For a long time success, even in their own field of commercial progress, seemed to hang fire—the statistics of trade returns for the generation following the war show no startling or decisive expansion, while such progress as there was proceeded by ruinous fluctuations of boom and slump, which in the complacently accepted economic anarchy of the time no one had a thought of controlling, and which at last plunged the country into so deep a trough of misery that the name of the Hungry Forties has passed into a proverb. And then, in the second half of that decade, came the great break through to prosperity.

Seldom, if ever, has any country been able to record such advance in every sort of material progress as that of Britain right through the 'fifties and 'sixties up to the post-Franco-German war boom year, 1872. In this mounting and multiplying prosperity every class had its share. The hungry forties became a bad old time infinitely remote. Chartism was dead, damned, and out of mind. The workman, buying cheap food with a better

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

wage, was as happy as the capitalist. For the last time, perhaps, England was able to reap the full advantage of an isolation, based on sea power. The year 1848, that of the long foreseen revolutionary upheaval on the Continent, ushered in a period of wars and rumours of wars that extended, in the 'sixties, even to the United States, but in which England was only involved to the comparatively trifling extent of burning—unless it is more appropriate to say freezing—her fingers in the Crimea, and putting down a mutiny, largely at Indian expense, of her own army in Bengal.

With her already immense start in mechanical progress, and with this additional brake imposed on that of her rivals, she was able to commit herself to a policy that would have been one of sheer genius if those responsible for it had only been able to appreciate its superb timeliness. As a matter of fact, they did nothing of the sort, but imagined they were applying principles of universal validity in throwing open their ports to the almost unrestricted inflow of foreign goods, and turning their traders loose on the world in the spirit of Wellington waving his cocked hat on the ridge at Waterloo as a signal for the whole line to advance. But Wellington could never have done this unless he had perceived that he had got the French army already on the run—had he been in the habit of giving such orders, he would never have got to that stage in any battle whatever. When Sir Robert Peel, and Gladstone after him, went all out for free trade, they were doing by luck or intuition what might have been the effect of exact and calculated timing. But in Victorian England the dogma of Free Trade became at least as deeply rooted in the national consciousness as that of any religion.

It was something more than a theory. If the spirit of free association, implicit in British civilization, was to make good its bid for the soul of Europe, against that of compulsion and empire inherited from Rome, its extension from the political to the economic sphere was a

CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE

matter, almost, of necessity. That was no doubt why both statesmen and people were caught up and swept along the current ; why even Peel, who had been put into office for the express purpose of maintaining protection, remained to carry free trade. For that which has grown up in the soul of a nation is not to be denied.

The contest between the two opposing principles of civilization enters upon its most critical phase towards the middle of the century. The Anglo-French entente, which had seemed in a way to becoming firmly established, was upset by the incurable crookedness of Louis Philippe, who in defiance of his most solemn pledges to England, reverted to the time-honoured French policy of a dynastic annexation of Spain, and that by a job of such blatant beastliness as to turn the not too sensitive stomachs of his Parisian subjects. The consequent estrangement of England was all that was needed to strip his Government of the last rags of its prestige. And so, in February, 1848, a quite trivial disturbance in the streets of Paris developed into a revolution, and soon governments were toppling all over Europe, and in Vienna itself, the citadel of reaction, the people rose and mutinied and chased Metternich into exile.

European civilization was in the melting pot, and no human foresight could envisage the outcome. Even when, in the following year, something like equilibrium seemed to have been restored, it was plainly without stability. There had been no decision between the forces of progressive liberation and those of reactionary imperialism—and now a third alternative was beginning to take shape, of an overthrow not only of the political, but of the whole existing social order ; an uprising of the international proletariat against the bourgeois-capitalist class, that would put all former differences out of date. Karl Marx and Engels had already, in 1847, issued their first manifesto of communism, and in Paris there had been a brief and abortive effort to put its principles into practice. In Germany, the House of Hapsburg had

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

resumed its session on the bayonets by which it had restored the semblance of order in its own dominions, but in the rest of Germany the issue hung in suspense.

One thing had become apparent. Constitutional government, on the English model, had shot its bolt on the Continent. It was one thing for English civilization to take root and thrive on virgin soil ; but for it to prevail against a tradition and habit of mind so much its senior was quite another proposition. The time had passed when Continental parties of progress would look to Britain as to the rock from which they were hewn.

Henceforth there could be no more question of Britain imposing her ideals upon the civilization of Europe. But while continuing to cultivate her own garden within its ever expanding limits, she would be the friend of liberty wherever it raised its head. Only, except in very exceptional circumstances, the friendship was not likely to be more than Platonic—or diplomatic. Lord Palmerston who, as Foreign Secretary, had a perfect genius for interpreting the sentiment of the middle class electorate, was a master in the technique of the swordless crusade. He would speak out loud and bold on behalf of every people struggling to be free ; he would defy tyranny to its face, amid thunders of applause ; but when it came to force of arms, he would reserve that for Chinamen, Greeks, and others equally incapable of applying it in return. There was one exception to this rule, when public opinion was lashed up into demanding a real crusade, against Nicholas, the Iron Tsar, who had come to be regarded as the very Lucifer of reactionary tyranny. But the exception was more apparent than real, for the only Englishmen who ran the least risk in their own persons were those who did so for a living, and the fact that the French were enlisted in the same venture was an actual insurance against danger from the only quarter capable of causing John Bull real qualms.

The fiasco of the ensuing campaign in the Crimea merely served to prove, to ghastly demonstration, the

CONSTITUTIONAL ENTENTE

complete mental atrophy of the old upper class, which had succeeded in retaining the army as its special preserve, and which exhibited, not for the last time, its complete failure to qualify, under modern conditions, for its traditional function of leadership. The experience was quite enough to damp any enthusiasm for war on the grand scale, for at least a generation.

And England of the mid-Victorian epoch was too busy with her business as workshop of the world to have either the time or inclination to exchange ledgers for swords. She was riding on the flood tide of prosperity ; her way was vindicated by statistics that staggered the imagination, and if the rest of the world hesitated to follow her lead—the loss was not hers. All was for the scientific best in the most progressive of all possible worlds, and guaranteed to go on faster and faster, towards the one far off divine event—whatever that might be—that should round off the programme.

CHAPTER V

SOME HAVE GREATNESS THRUST UPON THEM

All this of insular progress and Continental reactions, but scarcely a word of insular civilization on its way to becoming worldwide—surely the most pregnant development of all ! But to comprehend the spirit of that time, we must contrive to see things from its standpoint, and effect a mental purge of what would then have been foreknowledge. In the eighteenth century, Britain had lost an empire by taking overmuch thought about it ; in the first half of the nineteenth she acquired something more than an empire by persistently forgetting about it. And since, at the point of time that we have now reached, Britain is again on the verge of becoming empire conscious, it will be most convenient if we cast our eyes backward from there over this singularly unobtrusive process of expansion.

The loss of the American Colonies, in such ruinous circumstances, had planted in the mind of British statesmen an almost invincible aversion from any attempt to start a second empire of the same kind. Colonies that were mere plantations, and had no objection to having their affairs run for them by governors nominated from home, were all very well ; but white communities large enough to govern themselves and wishful to do so were better cut adrift to follow their own courses. From the Whig, or Radical standpoint, the sooner they demanded and obtained their freedom the better ; while from that of the old-fashioned Tories, a colony that you did not govern was no colony at all, and not worth its keep.

If ever there was a case of greatness being thrust upon any people, it is that of Britain in this third phase of her

SOME HAVE GREATNESS . . .

overseas expansion. During the great French war, it was Napoleon who cast an imperial eye upon the virgin continent of Australia ; he might as well have cried for the moon. Britain, to whom it was so much convenient coast-line for the dumping of her criminal population, entered quietly into vacant possession, with the option of New Zealand, whenever she might think it worth the trouble of occupying. She threw away colonies with both hands, to find herself saddled with dominions. And having done so, her chief concern was not so much how to keep these enormous white elephants, as to allow them to wander off into the jungle, as soon as they felt disposed, with the minimum of disturbance.

It was the same, or a similar, story with India. Here, too, she continued to slide down the slippery slope. The fiction of John Company's rule was obstinately maintained, even though its original function as a trading concern came to be completely dropped, and it had become no more than a fifth wheel in the governmental coach. But British rule in India could no more help growing than a tree can help thrusting out its roots ; Britain's difficulty was that of Rome—once having started to expand, it was impossible to stop. But Britain was more fortunate than Rome in that this process did have its natural limits in the Himalayas and the sea, and that at such time as her momentum carried her beyond them into Afghanistan, she did not fail to be apprised of the fact in a way more beneficent than agreeable.

There was always a certain glamour associated with the idea of British rule in India that could not fail to impress the least imperialistic imagination, but there was scarcely the faintest sentiment aroused over the colonies. Even so aggressive a nationalist as Palmerston was too deeply absorbed in the affairs of Europe to have a thought to spare for colonial office business, and towards the middle of the century there was scarcely a public man of any importance who was not more or less in agreement

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

with the sentiment expressed in a private letter by Disraeli—of all people—to the effect that the colonies were “a millstone about our neck”. At the same time, there were few who would have gone to the length of driving them out of the Empire; but as the Foreign Secretary, Lord Clarendon, put it as late as 1870, “We cannot throw them off, and it is very desirable we should part as friends.”¹

But Britain, by her persistent efforts to evade her destiny, had taken the best of all ways towards achieving it. No one as yet had envisaged a commonwealth of free peoples united by no other bonds than those of tradition and a common ideal. No one who had fixed his hopes on the greatness of empire would have dared abjure every vestige of imperial sovereignty, in the faith that the open door would prove the most powerful of all inducements to stop at home.

British colonial statesmanship made every possible blunder of indifference and ineptitude, but it avoided the supreme blunder of an efficient imperialism. Again and again the efforts of officials in Whitehall to interfere with matters they did not understand, or of English governors to make some pretence of governing, moved the colonials to wrath, but there was never any serious thought of coercing them. Even when a mob of enraged Canadians burnt down their own Parliament House and pelted their governor, there was not the least question of “rebels must be made to obey”. In this new empire the boot was on the other leg, and the only real difficulty rebellion was likely to encounter was that of finding anything to rebel against. In this way, the worst blunders—and some of them were very bad—of the home authority were corrected automatically. When, for instance, an attempt was made, as late as 1849, to revive the transportation of convicts, both Cape Colony and New South Wales banged, barred, and bolted their doors in the face of these uninvited guests—and that ended the matter.

¹ Quoted by S. A. Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism*, p. 47.

SOME HAVE GREATNESS . . .

The Commonwealth of Nations may be said to have arrived when, in 1867, there was a second Declaration of American Independence, this time by the united states of Canada. It was a declaration made as freely and spontaneously as that of the ever memorable Fourth of July—but this time it was made with the hearty goodwill of the Mother Country, whose only concern in the matter was that the Canadians themselves should settle their destinies to their common satisfaction, taking to themselves all the powers and privileges they might happen to want. And it turned out that what they wanted most of all was to remain united to Britain by bonds stronger than those of empire.

The obvious thing, from a geographical and economic standpoint, would have been for these Canadian states, on attaining their freedom of choice, to have accepted membership in the great republic to the South of them, that would have received them with far greater enthusiasm than that of the Mother Country for retaining them. But even the advantages of partaking in that great system of Continental free trade were not enough to compensate for the loss of the national individuality so freely conceded to them, and for that membership in a world-wide Power whose service was perfect freedom. It had been complacently, or regretfully, assumed in England that Canadian federation was the first step to complete separation. But as time went on it became apparent that the Canadians had no more intention of taking the second, than Mrs. Micawber of leaving Mr. Micawber.

And as for Britain, she had registered what was, perhaps, the most important advance in the whole of her history in a fit of sheer absent-mindedness. The birth of her premier Dominion was an event that neither then, nor for long afterwards, attracted any special attention. No political passion was aroused by it—it is probable that it did not turn a single vote. Not on that account did 1867 become a date in popular history. Even

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Macaulay's schoolboy might easily have been stumped out it in an examination paper.

And yet it is surely of overmastering importance that this very time, when the shadow of Bismarck had begun to fall upon Europe, and when the balance was beginning to tilt in favour of reaction, there should have been added in the Western Hemisphere another member to the world's company of democratic nations, and the tradition of freedom made to prevail over this not considerable territory.

Nor was this the only portion of the earth's surface in process of being made safe for Anglo-Saxon civilization. In Australia, in South Africa, in New Zealand democratic governments were in control, according to the free choice of the people themselves, though in Australia and South Africa the ultimately inevitable process of coming together in one Dominion still waited consummation. This, however, was a detail of minor importance; what mattered was that the Mother Country, whether through indifference, or by virtue of her own inherited tradition, had conceded the utmost possible freedom of choice to these daughter nations, and that they freely elected to remain with her not only in partnership, but also in the communion of those who hold common ideals. If ever the time should come when freedom and popular government should be fighting for their very right to survive, this accession of nation power to their cause might conceivably be enough to turn the scale.

Meanwhile, in England herself, this same year, 1867, saw these principles vindicated by the most exacting of all conceivable tests. For it was one thing to concede them in distant lands, as a matter of indifference or as the price of least resistance, but it was another for the class in possession of supreme power at home to honour them by a voluntary surrender. And yet this was what happened when a Parliament, representing a predominantly middle-class electorate, threw open the franchise to the wage-earning class in the towns, thus altering the whole

SOME HAVE GREATNESS . . .

basis of the Constitution to its own disadvantage and—not inconceivably—ruin. For it was also in 1867 that a book appeared that must rank surely among the most influential half-dozen of all time, though, like other epoch-making tomes, it can seldom have been read through—Karl Marx's *Capital*, in which the doctrine was formulated of a relentless class war between the wage-earning and capitalist, or bourgeois, classes. And here was the bourgeoisie conceding to its rival the option of exterminating it, and looting the whole of its possessions.

And yet this measure, of potential revolution, was carried by that Tory party in the State whose newest name was Conservative—and rightly so, if the most important thing of all to conserve in the Constitution be its living, and evolving, spirit. It is true that the move was inspired by the alien leader to whose guidance—in default of native brains—that party had committed its destinies. But as Disraeli had the genius to perceive, it was its true destiny to be the national party of England.

“Whenever,” he said, “the Tory party degenerates into an oligarchy, it becomes unpopular ; whenever the national institutions do not fulfil their original intention, the Tory party becomes odious—but when the people are led by their national leaders, and when by their united influence, the national institutions fulfil their original intentions, the Tory party is triumphant”

It was in such sense that Disraeli, by sponsoring the second Reform Bill, may be said—though the words were not his—to have dished the Whigs. For he had exposed them in the light of a class party, a “ Venetian oligarchy ”, conservative in the static sense, talking reform and achieving none. Whereas the old nobility and gentry, by staking their all on trust in the instincts of “ a great and understanding people ”, would rally that people to their leadership. Which may have been the dream of a romantic turned politician, but came nearer to realization than most.

But he was not putting the case quite fairly against

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

the other side—what politician does? For though the Whig-Liberals had showed more tendency during the long years of their power to talk Reform than to implement it, they were fully committed to it, and now that old Lord Palmerston, who in home matters had been as conservative as the most crusted Tory, was out of the way, there is not the least doubt that they were on the point of carrying it, when Disraeli forestalled them. And the newly enfranchised electorate—according to a contemporary witticism—took the first opportunity of saying, by a substantial majority, “Thank you, Mr. Gladstone!”

That is the outstanding, and astonishing, feature of this deliberate opening of the floodgates to democracy: except for a reactionary rump on both sides, there was no serious question of opposing it. Men of all shades of opinion, irrespective of class, were agreed that something of the kind had got to come. The spirit of the Constitution demanded that in England, no less than Canada, what touched all should be approved by all, and to that, all considerations of class interest had to give way.

It needed no storming of a Bastille or Bristol riots on this occasion to convince those in power that the time had come to share it with the people, in the wider sense. Nothing more serious than a few railings torn up, or pushed down, by a Reformist crowd which had come to let off steam in Hyde Park, and had found the gates locked against it by order of the Home Office. The incident was symbolic—the working class was pushing against the frailest of barriers; and once it had fairly signified its desire to enter into the charmed circle of the electorate, there could be no more serious question of stopping it than of imposing Crown Colony government on Canada. The British bourgeoisie had at least enough of the wisdom proper to the steam age to be averse from blocking up safety valves.

This year, 1867, therefore, saw British civilization, both at home and beyond the seas, more than ever wedded to those principles of liberty that it had so long

SOME HAVE GREATNESS . . .

claimed for its peculiar heritage, and that it was now beginning to take to its soul. There had never been a time when freedom for its own sake had been more prized than it was now in Victorian England. The very word was the most powerful reaction stimulus that could be applied by poets or politicians to their respective audiences. That thoroughly representative philosopher of the mid-Victorian epoch, John Stuart Mill, is as inseparably Mill on Liberty as Coke is upon Littleton.

And the Englishmen of the mid century did more than talk liberty. It was a consuming passion with them. That word respectable, that middle-class shibboleth, signified much more than a mere Philistine smugness. These solemn personages in frock coats and whiskers not only demanded respect, but, what is more, accorded it to themselves. Men like Cobden, or Bright, or Herbert Spencer, were thoroughly proud to be, and appear, what they were—burgesses of a dignity equal to that of any peer or esquire in the land. The virus of snobbery, endemic to England and a product of that very confusion of classes that appeared to contradict it, was already at work, but not yet so far as to undermine the invincible self-sufficiency of the Dickens generation.

The very reputation for Philistinism which has clung to these Victorians is at least partly due to their habit of proclaiming, loud and bold, their most outrageous opinions, without caring a curse what the world might think of them. A man like Herbert Spencer, if he thought Plato a drivelling sophist, or one like Macaulay, who believed the whole of philosophy to be an affair of long words and long beards, up and said so, whereas the man hardly exists to-day who would dare so much as to think against the grain of herd consciousness.

And this spiritual care of individuality was tempered with a fine generosity. The Englishman of those days did long for other people's freedom hardly less keenly than for his own. He loved to see his statesmen, like

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

old Pam—which was his affectionate nickname for Palmerston—standing up to tyrants and bullies all over the world. The cause of Italian freedom, in particular, was one which he espoused with something like fanaticism. Italy herself gave birth to no more passionate battle strains of her own Risorgimento than came from Swinburne and Meredith ; Garibaldi was as great a hero in England as among his own people. Nor was it merely lip homage ; the poor mill hands of Lancashire displayed a noble and pathetic readiness to endure with patience the miseries inflicted on them by the blockade of the Southern ports in the American Civil War, because they believed that the cause of the North was the cause of freedom.

But outside the expanding area of her dominions, there was no possibility of Britain carrying that cause to victory on her own shoulders. On the Continent of Europe she could only throw the weight of her influence into the scales, which continued, during the 'fifties and 'sixties, to oscillate violently between the contending principles of *Imperium* and *Libertas*, which a new Napoleon, on the throne of France, was attempting to reconcile in his great adventure of a Liberal empire. It was upon the success of this strange project, that of invoking an Emperor to check the march of empire, that the cause of freedom had now come to depend, after the great set-back of 1849. And the strange adventurer who had staked his all upon it had at least the penetration to divine that his only chance was through the friendship and co-operation of England. Whatever other follies he might commit, he would never repeat his uncle's supreme blunder of making her his enemy.

Unfortunately he was never able to present himself to England in any other light than that of a treacherous friend who might at any moment throw off the mask, and try a blow at her heart. Not even the fact that England and France had fought shoulder to shoulder in the Crimea could dissipate this deep-seated prejudice

SOME HAVE GREATNESS . . .

against Frenchmen in general, and an Emperor Napoleon in particular. This was a tragic misunderstanding, for the time was gone beyond recall when there would be any more prospect of a French than of a Spanish Cæsar imposing his sway upon Europe. That menace had shifted another stage eastward, and was slowly beginning to take form—the deadliest of all, to eyes capable of reading the signs of the times. And only by the co-operation of Britain and France could there be any real hope of averting it.

Perhaps, in the most favourable circumstances, it would have been a hope foredoomed. For the third Napoleon was a bruised reed for any cause to lean upon. He was—what Victor Hugo had branded forever on his memory—little ! little ! And if a Liberal empire were, indeed, not a contradiction in terms, it would take a supremely great man to make it a reality. But Napoleon in the Tuileries was never more than the rather seedy adventurer he had been in Soho—more of a dodger than a statesman, not even considerable enough to be wicked, but just enough of an actor to impose himself upon Europe in the part he had assumed.

The prospects of a real Entente Cordiale were at their brightest when in 1860 Cobden himself, the great champion of mercantile democracy, succeeded in getting Napoleon III to conclude a commercial treaty with England which seemed to portend a general lowering of European tariffs and perhaps even the dawn of the Free Trade Utopia of which the Manchester School had dreamed. But it was towards a very different goal that the course of events was destined to shape during that decade. It was in 1862 that Otto von Bismarck, having taken, as ambassador at Paris, the measure of Napoleon III, was appointed to the Chancellorship of Prussia, with the fixed intention of uniting Germany under Prussian leadership by a policy of calculated ruthlessness—blood and iron. England and France palpably failed to act together—England, indeed, being

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

blissfully unconscious that any vital interest of hers was involved in stopping Prussia. Lord Palmerston might, indeed, rally his octogenarian powers to the last of his challenges to an armed bully, when Prussia had induced her next victim on the list, Austria, to join with her in falling upon the little state of Denmark. But Bismarck, who calculated that England's sympathy with small nations would not extend to fighting for them, went on his way with complete indifference, nor did Napoleon show any signs of standing in if she had done so. And so things were allowed to take their course ; Denmark's German fringe as a *hors d'œuvre* ; then, in a whirlwind offensive of the Prussian New Model, Austria laid in the dust and the remainder of Germany forced into the Prussian orbit, including the Catholic South—which meant, in the long run, the fall of the time-honoured German civilization before the naked militarism which was what did duty for a Prussian soul ; next, precisely according to programme, came the turn of the Liberal Empire, whose Cæsar had stood by in helpless indecision while the vital positions were falling one by one before his eyes. And then—if anyone had been capable of understanding it—was seen what was perhaps the most ominous phenomenon of all, in the complete failure of an even partially liberalized state to compete in military efficiency with one which was to all intents and purposes an army and nothing else.

As for Victorian England, she watched with a detached interest the utter collapse of the great French army, the shelling and starving of what was still deemed to be pre-eminently the queen city of Western culture, and finally the appearance, in the centre of Europe, of a new empire so much more formidable than that of the third Napoleon, and more potentially formidable than that of the first had ever been. Europe, it was said at the time, had lost a mistress and gained a master. But that highly respectable consummation was, after all, none of England's business. John Bull was, if anything, inclined

SOME HAVE GREATNESS . . .

to reckon it a good business, on the balance. The French had no doubt got what they had been asking for ; the great German army, in the absence of sea power, was entirely harmless so far as concerned England, whose blood relation and traditional ally was what the prophet Carlyle was inspired to certify as “ noble, patient, deep, pious, and solid Germany ”—that very Germany, in fact, whose death sentence had been the Act at Versailles, converting the Prussian King into the German Emperor.

CHAPTER VI
EMPIRE OR LIBERTY

Britain was too much absorbed in her own affairs to have much thought to bestow on those of the Continent. She was now in the first vigour of her new, democratic regime. If the second Reform Bill had been a leap in the dark, she would seem to have landed on her feet. None of the diehard forebodings appeared in the least degree likely to be realized. The new electorate showed not the faintest disposition to question the established order of things ; the only effect of the change seemed to be a marked speeding up in the tempo of progressive, but certainly not of revolutionary, legislation, and a quickening of the already acute political consciousness that is the first condition of successful democracy. Perhaps the broadening of the franchise was responsible for the tendency to simplify the issue into a straight contest between two national teams, each under its leader with whose personality the cause was identified.

But then—what leaders ! Just as ninety years before it had been Pitt and Fox, so now it was “ Dizzy ” and Gladstone who stood forth as the respective champions of the Tory and Liberal ideals—and whatever may be thought of these ideals in themselves, surely no case was ever argued by mightier advocates, or on a loftier plane. Not only were they men of outstanding genius—one at least of them, if not both, in the realm of letters no less than of statesmanship—but they were in the best sense democrats, in that they never condescended to make that genius cheap. When Disraeli talked of a great and understanding people, he was saying no more than he, and his great rival, habitually assumed in addressing them. Gladstone, though he possessed the art of swaying huge audiences with a sort of hypnotic fascination, never

EMPIRE OR LIBERTY

did so by talking down to their presumed level. His sentences were as carefully balanced, and subtly qualified, when addressing an audience of workmen on Blackheath, as if they were graduates of his beloved Oxford, to whom he was elucidating some latest point of Homeric criticism. Nor did his audiences fail to appreciate this subtlest of all compliments to their intelligence, and not to their intelligence only, for Gladstone was wont to appeal with equal assurance to their moral consciousness as a great Christian people.

We can see now that these mighty opposites were no political Ormuz and Ahriman, but that their genius was, at bottom, complementary, like positive and negative poles of electricity ; the swing of the pendulum between them was a healthy rhythm, and they were as necessary to each other as they were to the country. But of the two Gladstone, despite his sophistries and spiritual pride and glaring inconsistencies, came nearer to expressing the spirit of the essential England than Disraeli, for all the latter's cult of patriotism and vision of empire.

For during the latter part of the century—that late Victorian age which is so different in character from the earlier as to become the very negation of all that we instinctively associate with the word—British civilization was passing through a phase of what was perhaps greater danger than any that had gone before, for the very reason that the danger was so subtle as to present itself under the guise of supreme opportunity. It was the ultimate and noblest temptation, in which power and dominion, with all their appertaining glory, are offered in exchange for a man's, or a people's, soul.

To understand this, we must realize the new and ominous trend that had been imparted to European politics by the triumph of Blood and Iron. The success of Bismarck, and his Prussian technique of ruthlessness, had been so sensational and overwhelming as to inspire envy and imitation in every ambitious or threatened nation, a success that had been at once too great and not

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

great enough, in that the gaping wound opened, against Bismarck's better judgment, in the side of France by the rape of two provinces, condemned the new Empire to stand armed to the teeth in unremitting guard over its stolen property, and Europe to a state of unrelaxed, if latent, tension. Nobody knew better than the Iron Chancellor himself that the armed peace of Europe was no more than a feverish preparation for the moment when France would judge her strength sufficient for challenging a decision she would never accept. And henceforth all his diplomatic wizardry was bent to the task of postponing that moment indefinitely by keeping her without an ally in Europe and—as far as practicable—diverting her energies to expansion overseas. And so long as he remained in control, by a miracle of beneficently unscrupulous finesse, he succeeded in insuring and reinsuring Germany, and with her, Europe, against a disturbance of that peace which, in his old age of satiated ambition, he had come to seek.

But a peace founded on injustice and maintained by a *tour-de-force* of diplomatic legerdemain, infects every nation participating in it with a subtle virus. Where there is no security, there can be no pursuit of any ideal more lofty than one which has since come to be defined as sacred egotism. The Darwinian nightmare of a universal struggle for survival, "wild cats fighting in a red-hot cage," translated into terms of power politics becomes the law of nations. Everyone for himself, and by any means—and devil take the hindmost!

But England had entered upon this new period in complacent isolation from the new trend of Continental politics. She was never more absorbed in her own affairs than during the early 'seventies; never more firmly set on the path of her own development. It remained to be seen whether, and how far, she would be sucked into the maelstrom of power politics that had engulfed her neighbours. And if that happened, how long could she preserve that truth to herself to lose which is to lose everything?

EMPIRE OR LIBERTY

So long as Gladstone continued to direct her policy, such truth would never be openly betrayed. In spite of those strange inconsistencies and casuistical evasions in practice, which make his one of the most perplexing characters on historical record, no one ever stood for a loftier ideal of international conduct. To Gladstone nations were moral, and could even be Christian. He would have endorsed in the most whole-hearted sense Bolingbroke's view that patriotism needs to be founded in great principles and supported by great virtue. And among the chief principles for which Britain stood, in his eyes, were those which he proclaimed in the course of his famous Midlothian speeches as including sympathy with freedom, acknowledgment of the equal rights of all nations, and peace "especially, were it but for shame, when we remember the sacred name we bear as Christians".

But with Disraeli it was otherwise. It is only too facile a biographical lead to refer everything to his Jewish descent, but the popular conception of a Jew is, in fact, one that fits him a great deal less than Gladstone—since he was, as a man and a statesman, rather deficient than otherwise in the money sense—an out-and-out Romantic of the Byron, d'Orsay tradition; moreover, one who could have been described, throughout his career, as positively drunken with the love of his adopted country, a patriot of patriots. Where then, it may be asked, does the Jew in Disraeli come in? And I would answer—in the quality of his patriotism. He loved England—but not quite in the English way.

What with Gladstone had been a matter of principle was with Disraeli one of race. "Progress and reaction," he once wrote, "are but words . . . all is race." This was the Jewish way of looking at things, the doctrine of the Chosen People. For the Jew was the Nazi of antiquity, profoundly convinced of his inherent superiority to those of Gentile blood, and the consequent righteousness of making a Promised Land of his neighbour's territory,

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

and converting the inhabitants into hewers of wood and drawers of water. It was just such a doctrine as was beginning to gain ground in various forms among the peoples of this new, iron age. Mythical blood-fellowships, chosen races, symbols of collective egotism raised to the highest power—Pan-German, Pan-Slav, even Pan-Turanian, each claiming unlimited rights at everyone else's expense and preparing to ride them roughshod over all others. It is an idea utterly foreign to the British spirit and tradition, to which the fiction of superior blood has always been profoundly repugnant. But the sort of patriotism advocated by Disraeli did come as near as practical politics would allow to a cult of Pan-Englandism. It was a thing genuinely calculated to shock and horrify such a moral consciousness as that of Gladstone.

But transmuted by Disraeli's romantic imagination it had a glamour and even a nobility that masked the grimness of its underlying egotism. England would never have endured a Bismarck. But Disraeli had enough understanding, and vision, of what England stood for and signified, to present the temptation in its subtlest form. He was, in the new Toryism to which he strove to educate his party, more liberal than the Liberals themselves. He believed in trusting the people, and not only in trusting them, but in bettering their condition. Reform with him was more than a mere granting of votes—it was constructive and social. The Disraelian Tory was at once constitutional and progressive, he stood—as Charles I had tried to do—for a national as against a class policy. And in this he could claim to be far more advanced than the Gladstonian Liberal, with his essentially middle-class outlook and capitalist *laissez-faire*.

Disraeli would never have carried the country with a programme of crude imperialism. Ever since his first rebuff from the new electorate at the polls, he had set himself to capture its imagination. He approached the nation in the same way as he did the Queen, by offering something more colourful and exciting than the rather

EMPIRE OR LIBERTY

prosaic worthiness that was preached at it by Gladstone. Economy, righteousness, peace, are blessings which are only properly appreciated in their absence. When they are conferred, for any length of time, the recipients take them as a matter of course, and find them humdrum. Gladstone's great Government had, in fact, done its work so thoroughly, had so sated the appetite for Liberal reform, that when it approached its term of office the country was, this time, less inclined to say "Thank you" than "Good-bye, Mr. Gladstone", and ask for a change of programme.

It got what it wanted, and in full measure, from the Oriental wizard. Not perhaps in the way of social reform, where the work done was more sound than sensational, but in the long neglected field of foreign policy. And here the country was offered the intoxicating spectacle of a diplomacy that proceeded by a series of dazzling coups, and raised the prestige of Britain to a height to which, even in the days of Palmerston, it had not attained. For this new style was quite different from Pam's bull-in-a-china-shop methods; it had all the thrilling dexterity of the best conjuring. The secret purchase of the Khedive's Suez Canal shares was a feat of diplomatic sleight of hand that became legendary; the elevation of the Queen of England into the Empress of India was a mystic enhancement of every average Englishman's own self esteem, a thing that did more than anything else could have done to make him empire conscious.

That was, in fact, Disraeli's most enduring work; he had kindled the national imagination with a fire that nothing—not even his own fall—could put out. It is not easy to realize how completely the whole national outlook had changed during the six years of his power. Gone forever were the days when the colonies were thought of as a burden to be shed as soon as possible—or not thought of at all. Britain had woke up to find herself a world Empire, the greatest of all empires, one on which the sun never set. And having made that discovery, she was

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

not likely to be lured back to her old, self-contained insularity.

But this revolutionary change of standpoint—how was it going to affect that living and growing truth to herself and her ideals, that is the theme of our story? For—unless we have been wholly wrong in our understanding of it, there is something alien to the British spirit in the very idea of empire. And of this Disraeli himself had a certain inkling. For it was no ordinary empire that he envisaged, but, like that of Napoleon III, a compromise between conflicting principles. *Imperium et Libertas*, or, in plain English, compulsion and freedom. Disraeli's formula, in fact, left the whole question open, whether empire or liberty was to be the ruling principle, or in what proportions they were to be combined. He himself was under strange illusions about the amount of *Imperium* it would be possible to mix with the *Libertas* even of the daughter nations. He had some idea of keeping the unoccupied Crown lands under control of the home country, and of imposing a system of free trade within the Empire—infractions of their sovereignty that the colonials would never have dreamed of standing. Fortunately they were quite capable of nipping any such projects in the bud.

But these were, after all, members of British—or, at least, European—race, and therefore might be presumed proper subjects for *Libertas*. It was in dealing with alien and backward races that *Imperium* had fullest scope, and here it was that Britain stood in the deadliest temptation to go whoring after strange gods. For not only was the spirit of militant imperialism rampant and triumphant among the Powers of the Continent, but Western civilization was—with its will or against it—on the eve of its final great period of expansion. The vast virgin spaces of Africa, just in process of being “discovered”, and not only they, but the ancient civilizations of the East, “backward,” according to the new machine-powered reckoning, presented themselves as a veritable Eldorado for exploitation by European capital.

EMPIRE OR LIBERTY

There was uncommonly little that was romantic about the operations of that fluid and cosmopolitan form of capital known as finance capital, though Disraeli, in his Suez Canal coup, had proved not incapable, at a pinch, of investing even these with an aura of romantic mystery. But it was not upon this aspect of imperialism that he cared to dwell even—we may be sure—in his own thoughts. There was nothing common or mean either in his own nature or in his vision of empire. He said, and he believed, that it was an empire of liberty, truth, and justice. But that belief with him was no more than indicative ; with Gladstone it was more than a belief, it was a command, a divine imperative—and not only with Gladstone, but with that whole school of Liberal thought that he represented. “Perish our dominion in India”—such were the words of the ultra-patriotic but also Liberal historian, Freeman—“rather than that we should strike one blow or speak one word on behalf of the wrong against the right !” and, strange as they sound to-day, they expressed a point of view by no means uncommon in the 'seventies. But not that of Disraeli. His language when challenged, at the height of his career, was equally explicit :

“Cosmopolitan critics—men who are the friends of every country but their own—have denounced this policy as a selfish policy. My Lord, it is as selfish as patriotism.”

There is no mistake about this. It is the language of *sacro egoismo*, of the new—or perhaps we should say the ancient and traditional—spirit of armed imperialism that had taken possession of Europe.

—And Disraeli—the Oriental wizard—was giving his adopted country his first dazzling exhibition of power politics, in the modern style. The Near East was selected as the field ; England's then supposed arch-enemy, Russia, for the part of villain to England's knight errant, with her old *protégé* of the Crimea, Turkey, as a not too reputable damsel in distress. According to the rules of the game, therefore, Turkey, as friend, was to be always

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

right, Russia always wrong. Unfortunately Turkey had her own game to play, which included a peculiarly revolting exhibition of frightfulness in Christian, but rebel, Bulgaria. As Russia was threatening to start a crusade on behalf of these Christian communities, it was obviously England's, and her Premier's, lead to turn a Nelson eye to this tactlessness on the part of the friendly Turk. Not so Gladstone's. To him, something higher than the country's political interest was at stake, her honour, her good name, her integrity to heaven were forfeited if she had part or lot, even by her silence, in these devilries. He appealed to the moral sense of the country—murder most foul, and the murderer only fit to be expelled bag and baggage from Europe, were it ten times England's interest to keep him there !

It was a duel in which not only personalities, but mighty principles were contending. Whatever effect Gladstone's impassioned appeal had produced seemed to be dissipated by the spectacle of the Russian armies bearing down on Constantinople, and the threat to what was then supposed to be a British vital interest. Moral consciousness does not thrive in war fever : Bulgarian atrocities were forgotten ; there was no God but Jingo—now first heard of in England—and Disraeli was his prophet. The country could no longer complain that politics were dull. It was led to the very brink of war ; one militant and masterly move succeeded another. And then, as if by the wand of a master illusionist, the whole scene was changed ; the grey armies were halted just short of their goal ; a European Congress gave the Earl of Beaconsfield, as he had now become, his crowning opportunity of achieving peace with honour—a peace, that is to say, in which Britain could claim to have scored a number of points off Russia. That was quite enough to enable him to make his bow amid thunders of applause, no one troubling to reckon what precise British interest was likely to be served by these complicated rearrangements of other people's frontiers ; still less

EMPIRE OR LIBERTY

anyone suspecting that the real master hand in the final episode had been that of Bismarck, whose ulterior purposes were served by manœuvring Britain and Russia into a state of chronic hostility by inducing Britain to relieve him of the invidious task of curbing Russian ambitions in the Balkans.

Never had the technique of power politics been presented in a more attractive form ; never had it been invested with such a halo of romance. England saw herself in the light of a great imperial Power—for the motive of this new policy had been as ostentatiously imperial as that of the Crimean adventure had been European ; the most dramatic stroke of all had been the appearance of an Indian division at Malta. Disraelian imperialism had so far had all the fascination, and something of the harmlessness, of a splendid game—one in which Britain retained her amateur status.

He would have done well to have died at that moment of triumph, instead of lingering on for three years of anticlimax and disillusion. For after that nothing seemed to go right with the new imperialism : a Zulu and two Afghan wars, mounting expenditure and—quite illogically—the luck of atrocious weather and ruined harvests gave Gladstone his opportunity to rally popular opinion to a verdict that seemed decisive against these new courses. But the ball had been set rolling, and not even Gladstone, with all his majority, could stop it. Britain was launched, for good or ill, on an imperial career, or if not imperial something beyond empire for which no name had as yet been coined.

CHAPTER VII

IMPERIAL FEVER

Almost my first clear memory is that of watching, from my nursery window, for a sudden puff of white smoke with a flash in the middle, high up on Chatham Lines, repeated every minute ; a silent gun always a second or two ahead of another smokeless one that boomed. Which fascinating spectacle had been arranged by the grown-ups, because, as they informed me, the old German Emperor had just gone to Heaven.

It would be years and decades before my conscious mind could guess the significance of that which had impressed itself so uncannily beneath the surface—like fate knocking at the door, in the opening bars of the Fifth Symphony. It was not only the snapping of a last link with a past incredibly remote—of the war against Napoleon and the Battle of the Nations—but, as it were, the starting gun of a future fraught with terrible potentialities. For the removal of this worthy but rather stupid old gentleman meant that the position of Bismarck was fatally compromised, and the genius of Bismarck had, in his old age, become the main factor making for European stability.

Not that he had in the least modified his principles, or rather his entire lack of principle, but that he had convinced himself that the new militarist Germany he had created, as a “saturated Power”, had more to gain from keeping her winnings than trying to add to them. The peace at which he aimed was one of blood and iron, the *status quo* of an armed anarchy, prolonged indefinitely by a diplomatic finesse that would stick at nothing. Plant France in Tunis—that would keep the Latin race in a state of inflamed hostility against itself ; plant England in

IMPERIAL FEVER

Egypt—that would keep the Western democracies from any danger of an *entente cordiale* ; insure with Austria against Russia, and re-insure behind her back *with* Russia ; set all Germany's neighbours by the ears against each other ; deceive everybody ; go on arming to the teeth ; seek and ensue peace on earth by means of calculated ill will.

Bismarck, with Moltke's great army to back him, felt himself equal to the task. He was old—true ! but then he had it in his mind to found a diplomatic dynasty ; to leave his power and technique to the son he had apprenticed to its mysteries. But now the aged master was gone, who had been as wax in his Chancellor's hands, and after the three months it took his dying heir to follow him, the Empire passed into the control of a young man with a withered arm and one of those overcharged nervous systems that had come to be typical of the new age. His actions, that is to say, would be dictated by his reactions ; and any competent pathologist might have predicted what would be his reaction to so dominating a presence as that of Bismarck.

And with Bismarck sacked, the key position of Europe was occupied no longer by a master of statecraft, but by one who was not even the master of his own spirit. We to-day, who know the unmeasurable catastrophe towards which, during the next quarter of a century, Europe was heading, can hardly refrain from seeking a villain of the piece ; some chief of many throned powers hatching treason against civilization. Nothing half so good ! For it would have been better for the world if some ~~completely~~ immoral intelligence, like that of Bismarck, had remained in control. A strong man armed, even if he is a bad man, may maintain the peace in his own interests. A weak man armed, and subject to uncontrolled impulses, will not be able to keep it. There was not only anarchy among the nations, but anarchy in the counsels of the chief nation. There was no ruler of Germany, no German policy, but a chaos of official

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

mediocrities, of sexual degenerates, of backstairs intriguers, of—to use foreign words for which there is happily no English equivalent—*finasseurs* and *arrivisti*. There was also an immensely powerful military machine in the charge of men incapable of controlling or, once in motion, of stopping it, and yet itching for the opportunity to try it out in earnest. And behind all this was the released inferiority complex of a people who, from constituting the anvil of Europe, had turned to a hammer of Thor, proved capable of smashing nations and empires like eggshells, a people incited by incessant propaganda to dream dreams of nothing less than a *Pax Germanica* embracing the world. For the round world surface, in space-time measurement, was becoming smaller and smaller with every improvement of transport—already, it might be, of more governable compass than the flat world centred in old Rome.

By a tragic coincidence, the man who, six years after his cousin William's accession, succeeded to unlimited power over the vast Russian Empire, and thus to an almost equal extent had thrust upon him the responsibility for the destinies of mankind, was not even a higher but a lower degenerate; a pathetic creature of subnormal intelligence and vitality who would only too gladly have declined it, and had at least enough penetration to divine that his inadequacy was his doom.

It was in this anarchic world, driven on by conflicting egotisms towards collective suicide, armed with forces of destruction that it knew not how to control, and even its divided power committed to the feeblest and unsteadiest hands, that Britain was undergoing the great process of transformation into senior partner of what called itself a British Empire, no other word having been found to describe a form of human society for which there was no precedent in the records of mankind.

It was a change, like all the great changes of history, chiefly of soul. There had been a British Empire in early and mid-Victorian times, but Britain had not become

IMPERIAL FEVER

empire conscious till after the experience of Disraeli's great Premiership. It is hard to realize how completely different the whole outlook of the ordinary Englishman had become by the end of the century, from what it had been at the beginning of its last quarter, when the Colonies were still accorded the mingled patronage and contempt proper to rather disreputable poor relations. It has come to seem hardly credible that the assumption by the Queen of the title Empress of India should have been abhorred by a great many of her subjects as the un-English and unconstitutional innovation that, in fact, it was, unless the Queen's English could accommodate itself to a wholly new meaning for the idea of Empire.

But could it? That was the question to which no decisive answer had as yet been given. For when the late Victorians said Empire they had a way of meaning it—perhaps not almost and altogether, but as near as they could get within the limits of practical politics. Disraeli had contrived to leave the question open with his formula of *Imperium et Libertas*, which might mean either as much imperial scaffolding as need be for the edifice of freedom, or as much freedom as it was safe to allow within the bonds of empire. Before his time, the whole emphasis had been on liberty, even if this meant the liberty of walking out of the Empire at any moment. During the 'eighties and 'nineties it was just the other way about; England had begun to think—or more accurately to feel—imperially.

The tide was drawing her with overmastering strength in that direction. The hunger of capital for employment, and the opening up of vast fields of exploitation in savage or economically backward lands, added to the spirit of cut-throat nationalism that was rampant on the Continent, were setting the pace of an imperial competition into which the Power that had so far outstripped all others in overseas expansion, could hardly help being drawn.

Nothing, indeed, is more remarkable than the way in which individual statesmen found themselves carried along

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

the stream as helplessly as if they had, indeed, been engaged in shooting Niagara. Even Bismarck, with his thoroughly old-fashioned European outlook, and his less than no interest in colonial adventure, found himself drawn into the scramble for territory.

The strangest case of all is that of Gladstone. There can be no doubt whatever of his whole heart and soul having been in the anti-imperialist crusade that had swept him to power with the specific mandate from the country of scrapping the whole policy of imperialist adventure, and getting back to the old ways of righteous and Liberal insularity. Nor did he fail to back his words by deeds up to—and beyond—the limits of what, even to Liberal Englishmen, seemed practical politics. Witness his wise and successful abandonment of the attempt to impose the *Pax Britannica* on the Afghan tribesmen ; his acceptance of the national humiliation of clearing out of the Transvaal, after three signal British defeats at the hands of her rebel burghers, rather than the “ blood-guiltiness ” of avenging them ; witness, finally, the refusal, until too late, to move a finger to help General Gordon, sacrificed by the Government itself to a worse than forlorn hope of evading imperial commitments.

And yet we find Gladstone being drawn into the imperialist current in spite of himself—borne along it faster and further even than Disraeli. Not only did the process of expansion go forward with gathering momentum in Africa and the Pacific, but Britain found herself committed to no less an adventure than the occupation of the Nile Valley—one into which Disraeli, even by the Satanic blandishments of Bismarck, had declined ~~to~~ be drawn. Nothing with which Disraeli had ever been charged violated every Liberal principle so flatly as the bombardment by British ironclads of the forts of Alexandria ; of the invasion of Egypt in the interests of European—and Semitic—usurers ; of the slaughter, by weapons of precision, of a patriot army ; and the subjection of the country to a regime, supported by British

IMPERIAL FEVER

bayonets, whose avowed object was to screw out of the innocent peasantry the last farthing of the debt that an unbusinesslike and alien ruler had been bamboozled into incurring on their behalf. All this on the solemn understanding that, officially speaking, Britain was not in Egypt at all ; in so far as she, in fact, was solemnly pledged to clear out bag and baggage at the earliest possible moment. And meanwhile Queen Victoria continued to be the effective successor of Cleopatra and Hatshepsut as Queen Pharaoh, exercising her sovereignty through her Viceroy or High Commissioner, Lord Cromer, from whose unprecedentedly efficient methods of government the peasant derived benefits for which the service of the debt was extremely modest payment. But they were, in all but name and form, the methods of empire—"not what they like but what is good for them," as Cromwell said, and Augustus might have said.

And into what these methods were capable of developing was seen in the horrible incident of the Denshawai shooting-plus-flogging in 1907—one of the few instances of almost Prussian frightfulness on British record. And this, it must be noted, with a Liberal government in power at home, and a Liberal Foreign Secretary accessory after the fact.

And if even under Liberal auspices the drift to empire was so strong, how much more compelling must it be when the choice of the democratic electorate veered—as under such circumstances was bound to happen—to the support of that opposite party to which Disraeli had bequeathed the championship of the imperialist ideal as the first plank of its programme.

Force of outward circumstances merely reinforced a process of inner conversion whose first beginnings were apparent as far back as the 'sixties, and which gained strength continually throughout the remainder of the century. The old, generous sympathy with freedom, which had come to be the special property of the English spirit, was challenged more and more insistently by a

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

worship of discipline and authority, that had hitherto been the most un-English thing imaginable.

It is not without significance that the first of the great Victorians who can be described as a pure-blooded imperialist was Carlyle; and the older Carlyle grew the more open became his hatred of freedom in any shape or form, the more undisguised his hero-worship of tyrants, dictators, and bullies wherever they could be found—and most of all, in Prussia, his true spiritual home. There was his disciple, Froude, faithfully carrying on his work, by writing up the history of Tudor England into a veritable epic of imperialism with Henry VIII as hero, and almost a relish for the incidental axe work; and Ruskin, the friend of Austrian tyranny in Italy, while it lasted, and of blind obedience to every sort of constituted authority, particularly his own, another verbal pioneer of Empire. Indeed, it is something more than a coincidence that at this very time of budding imperialism, the cult of all things Teuton in England was at its height. Even language had to conform, buses becoming folk-wains and prefaces forewords on the lips of de-Latinizing Pan-Saxons.

The reaction against the bourgeois ideals of the mid-century was proceeding apace, and changing the spiritual complexion of the age almost beyond recognition. And, indeed, the very term Victorian is not a little deceptive. For the time of which many of us have clear recollections—that of the *fin de siècle*, or the Roaring 'Nineties—is as different from the true Victorian heyday as that, in its turn, differs from the age of knee breeches and perukes.

No longer do we visualize the typical Englishman as a figure pot-hatted and bewhiskered, portentously solid in embodiment of what have now, in the *fin de siècle*, come to be branded as all the seven deadly virtues. That figure has become at best one of fun, at worst of contempt and execration. To be respectable is to be Philistine, a back number—the man of the new age, if he must glory, does so in his pushfulness, his hustling efficiency. But

IMPERIAL FEVER

whereas the older Victorian was solid enough to stand four-square on his own individuality, his supplanter, when he hustles, stampedes with the crowd, shouts with it, and—if intellectual—conforms to its most advanced orthodoxy: in short, becomes one of his age's many standardized, rather cheap products. And with the growth of standardization the demand for liberty contracts.

Thus the age was being educated for imperialism not only directly but indirectly. For the spirit of empire is one of compulsion, and an imperial people needs to be one from which the disturbing factor of individuality has been as far as possible eliminated. Now the very stronghold of Victorian individualism had been that sturdy middle class from which Dickens had garnered his rich harvest of character. And by the end of the century that class had been so transformed that the very name had almost lost its significance. For, like the railways, society was in process of reconstituting itself on a two-class basis. Nobody could say where middle began and upper ended; nobody would have been so badly mannered as to try.

What exclusiveness had been left in the old, upper class, had the economic bottom finally knocked out of it by the slump in the value of land precipitated by a series of atrocious harvests at the end of the 'seventies, but really caused by the competition of cheap grain from overseas. But the ownership of land retained a prestige value unaffected by rent rolls, and as estates came into the market, they were quickly bought up by the owners of that ~~more~~ fluid form of capital which was the backing and product of machine power, or of that most fluid and abstract form of all which is called finance capital. The upper class which, for all its aggressive lack of brains, possessed the intuitive resourcefulness that seems inherent in the English character, pursued a strategy that, if not thought out, was none the less masterly, of keeping the framework and spirit of the squirearchy intact by throwing

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

open the membership of the great informal club, called the county set, to everybody with enough money to pay his fees, and enough sense of what was what to adapt himself to the conditions of his new environment. And in order that the next generation, at least, might be indistinguishable from the genuine product, a discipline of practically compulsory education was imposed at public schools that were really character factories, ruthlessly de-intellectualizing its raw human material in order to guarantee a type of standardized gentleman.

The result was to produce such a vision of society as Karl Marx had postulated as the basis of his class war, and that his fellow Jew, Disraeli, had described as "the two nations"; on the one hand the wage-earners, on the other, the capitalists, who, in England, drew into their orbit that "black-coated" class who called their wages salaries, and promoted themselves to the order of esquires. For the villa was the country house in miniature, and every genteel suburb the abode, or dormitory, of something as much like a county set as strenuous imitation, backed by limited means, could create. And in consequence, the standardization of gentility in the suburbs was even more rigid than in the shires.

The result was a change none the less profound because nobody noticed or spoke about it. For it meant that the great middle class, that had been the backbone of Victorianism, had been, to all intents and purposes, eliminated. The high stomached independence of men like Cobden and Bright, the spiritual pride of the agnostic fathers and old-fashioned Radicals, the toughness of fibre and thickness of skin that characterized the old-fashioned bourgeoisie—these, for good or ill, were fast being submerged under a sea of gentility, of varying depth but level surface.

Through this new standardized upper-cum-middle class consciousness, currents of herd feeling passed with little resistance. It was only too easy for the idea of empire to take hold of the imagination, in its crudest and least

IMPERIAL FEVER

English form. There only needed a prophet—and a prophet arose, in shape of Rudyard Kipling, a young Anglo-Indian journalist and ballad-maker of amazing brilliance, who, towards the end of the century, as the acknowledged interpreter of the imperialist spirit, exercised what was probably the most powerful influence of any contemporary writer. And implicit in Kipling's work was a philosophy formulated appropriately as the law of wolves, and giving the lie direct to everything hitherto associated with the British spirit and tradition.

"Keep ye the law, be swift in all obedience!" this, and innumerable similar passages, might have emanated from a latter-day Virgil proclaiming the *imperium* of a new Rome. The term "Sons of the Blood", applied to the ethnographical hotchpotch of white-skinned colonials, with its implication of all different blooded peoples outside the law constituting "lesser breeds", is, perhaps, more Jewish than Roman—the doctrine of the chosen people translated into good Bible English; but it is also fully in line with the various Pan-racial fictions propagated on the Continent.

But there was in this new imperialism another element that is certainly not Jewish nor even wholly Roman, and which—if we must give it a name—we can best describe as Prussian. This consists of an aggressive and flamboyant militarism, a sensuous relish for anything associated with the technique or discipline of arms, along with a gloating luxuriance in brutality and violence for their own sakes. Kipling is responsible for the apotheosis of the private soldier, "Tommy Atkins"—and on the self-same grounds that had moved Wellington, in his realist way, to describe his Peninsular heroes as the scum of the earth. The Kipling Tommy is worshipful for the very exuberance of his ruffianism, a breaker of all laws except that of the barrack square, a liar, a thief (self-confessed and glorying in the terms), a drunkard, a lecher, and an illiterate Mohock—whose life, for that very reason, is held up to the devotees of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

the old respectability, the "poor little, street-bred people", as the lordliest on earth.

The idealized empire builder, the Kiplingese colonial, was merely a larger and meatier Tommy, transported to the freedom of virgin lands and great open spaces, the hundred-per-cent he-man, of richest and ruddiest blood, leading a life magnificently contrasted with that of the sedentary and over-civilized town-dweller.

That very contrast is the attraction of the *fin de siècle* brand of imperialism. The Empire proclaimed by Kipling, and boomed in the new cheap Press and the music halls, the chief of which significantly took to itself that very name, was the one on which the sun never set—or rose either, because it was the empire of a dream, a Never-never Land of escape from a bondage of salaried routine and dreadful gentility. The amazing skill of Kipling himself in providing emotional compensation for others arose from the fact that his own need had been the greatest of all. We are beginning to realize now that the most personally revealing of all his books, *Stalky and Co.*, was autobiographical, not in the sense that any of the things described in it had ever happened, but as the wish-dream of a short-sighted and abnormally repressed schoolboy, about the sort of super-boy who, fashioned in the image of his creator, makes masters and monitors his footstool, and with the aid of mighty allies, achieves the crowning solace of inflicting, on his chief oppressor, all the tortures that the imagination even of the gentlest victim conjures up, according to its capacity, for the bully—"and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies."

Kipling's genius lay in his capacity to glut starved emotions with a banquet of imperial magnificence. Ha' done with the tents of Shem ! Enter upon the heritage of the Blood, the Heaven where there ain't no commandments and men bulk huge as Brocken spectres ! See ! conquer ! enjoy ! All these dominions and liberties, with the glory thereof, shall be yours in a moment of

IMPERIAL FEVER

time if . . . for such offers always have an implied "If" attached to them . . . if you will but sign away that unprized heritage of insular freedom you already possess.

For it is the burden of all empires that to impose compulsion is to accept it—the imperial breed is the slave horde, "swift in all obedience."

If we are right in this belief, then it is evident that during those two hectic decades that closed the nineteenth century England was passing through a time of peril as deadly as any in her history. In previous crises she had fought to preserve her soul inviolate against conquest from without. Now the menace came from within, and arose not from weakness but from strength. Was the British Empire destined to compass that fall of Britain which the France of Napoleon and the Spain of Philip had broken themselves in attempting? Must she sacrifice all that made her national life worth living, all the high promise of that life for the future of mankind, to become a more commonplace empire, and tread the well-worn imperial road to ruin?

The danger may not have been so great as might have been deduced from taking the prophets and propagandists of the new imperialism too literally. It is in any case rash to pin down an Englishman to his philosophy—even a Kipling, though he might pass for a Prussian amongst Englishmen, would amongst Prussians be more likely to qualify for a concentration camp. Such loving knowledge of an English countryside and its folk—their kindliness, their stubborn independence¹—above all the John Bull downrightiness that snubs and sacrifices the crude conceit of patriotism; these things are sovereign antidotes against any sort of imperial or Totalitarian virus. There was, perhaps, more froth than substance in this for which Kipling himself has coined a phrase, "jelly-bellied flag flapping."

¹ "When he stands stock still in the furrow, his stupid ox eyes on your own And grumbles 'This isn't fair dealing!' My son, leave the Saxon alone."

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Nevertheless the pace was fast and furious enough, while it lasted. The new imperialism, was, indeed, far from having possessed the whole community even at the close of the century; the old, insular Liberalism was too deeply rooted to be plucked up out of the soil best suited to it, that of the great *non-conformist* community and whatever remained of the fast dwindling middle class; while as for the wage-earners, their enthusiasm for the Empire was in more or less inverse proportion to the awakening of their own class consciousness. But among the newly enlarged order of esquires, or Marxian bourgeoisie, the cult of the Empire was hardly less widespread than that of the toothbrush, and they were the most dynamic element in the society of this period. It was they who provided the music halls with the bulk of their audiences, and the yellow press with its readers. It was for their sons that the work of empire building offered a golden field of employment. It was for those of them who crowded the morning trains from the suburbs to the cities—Kipling's symbolic nine-fifteen—into whose otherwise cabined and unnatural existences the process of dyeing the map red brought an element of romance, and a pride of vicarious manhood.

It was a grand and thrilling time, because it appeared as if nothing could ever go wrong with the Empire except through a criminal refusal to go ahead with it. There had been the Majuba surrender and the betrayal of Gordon to show what happened when Liberals and Little Englanders got into the seat of power; and nobody doubted for a moment that the glorious British army would easily have accounted, and could yet account, for both Boers and Mahdi. Henceforth nothing would suffice but a policy of complete and unqualified patriotism, with no Gladstonian nonsense about blood-guiltiness and the rights of lesser breeds. To doubt that Britain had a right to everything she could get was itself treasonable; and even if, for the sake of argument, she were in the wrong, such a consideration would never cramp the style

IMPERIAL FEVER

of any true patriot : " My country, right or wrō'ig " was, indeed, a catchphrase.

It was inevitable, under such circumstances, that the Gladstonian regime should have crashed. After his last wonderful triumph over Disraeli it seemed as if nothing could go right with the old man. The spirit of his time had turned against him, and his spells had ceased to bind. He was not even in a position to give a clear moral lead ; his Liberalism, like his eloquence, was hedged about with too many qualifications and equivocations—witness his record in Egypt. And then, finding himself brought up against the eternal problem of Ireland, by the fact that the Irish vote had at last come to determine the balance of power between the British parties, he had a convenient and divine inspiration to secure it for his own by offering Ireland what, at first sight, appeared to be the full Liberal solution of her discontents ; the right to govern herself, in all domestic matters, in her own way.

But divine inspiration does not always discriminate and Gladstone—for once—had failed to make a very necessary qualification, to the effect that the nation he proposed to free was not one, but two, bitterly opposed by faith and tradition. To the smaller Protestant nation Home Rule signified an infamous conspiracy to hand over by force the Queen's most loyal subjects to the tyranny of a hated, and despised, anti-British majority. To such an outrage they would die rather than submit, and, if they had needed any prompting, it was soon forthcoming from politicians of the ultra-patriotic faction who assured them that they would be right in starting a civil war. Thus, something had been achieved in English politics that actually surpassed the Gilbertian absurdity of every boy or girl being born Liberal or Conservative, for now every one of the Conservatives and Liberals was fated to support one of two precisely similar tyrannies—that of a British Empire over Nationalist Ireland, or of a Catholic Empire over Protestant Ireland.

The Tories might survive this sort of thing, for after

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

all they had never emblazoned liberty on their banners, but the Liberal Party had pronounced its own ultimate death sentence, and Ireland—or rather Ulster—was destined to be its grave. For, with its traditional recruiting grounds more and more encroached upon by the new, two-class grouping of society, it had nothing to depend upon but its championship of a principle more deeply rooted than any other in the heart of the nation. Let it betray that, and the last reason for its existence was gone. And Gladstone, with his senile incapacity for taking into vision more than one aspect of a problem, had saddled his party with the eventual and damning obligation to conquer the Protestant community by British guns and bayonets—since by no other means would it be conceivably possible to force Catholic rule down their throats.

That obligation could only mature in a future that might be indefinitely postponed—though assuredly not evaded. But the immediate effect of Gladstone's Irish crusade was to precipitate that eclipse of Liberalism that must in any case have resulted from the tendency of the landed and monied interests to amalgamate politically as well as socially.

But the shattering and decisive blow came not from the secession of the Whig right wing, but of the extreme Radical left, as represented by Joseph Chamberlain, the almost revolutionary ex-Mayor of Birmingham, whose personality, during the ensuing twenty years of Tory supremacy, comes to dominate the political scene as effectively as that of Gladstone before him. For just as Gladstone had, to the average Englishman, identified himself with the cause of liberty, so did "Joe", after his assumption of the Colonial Office in 1895, with that of Empire.

We now, in light of subsequent events, are in a better position to appreciate the significance of this extraordinary man's career, and by how natural a transition the demagogue of the early 'eighties becomes the pillar

IMPERIAL FEVER

of throne, empire, and the possessing classes, in the late 'nineties. For we have seen the same sort of thing happening to an even more extreme degree in the nation of our own, post-war, epoch. Chamberlain was of the stuff of which, in other countries, dictators are made, the man of volcanic energy and magnetic appeal, who successfully advertises his capacity to get things done, within the framework of the modern state, with a speed and efficiency all his own. The words constantly applied to him even by his enemies were "hustler", and "pushful". He had got things done in Birmingham that had made the town a pioneer model of municipal self-help; he had, too, imparted a new and sinister efficiency to the art of managing a democratic electorate, by organizing a Birmingham Radical caucus on the most up-to-date Transatlantic lines. And now he aspired to exercise this gift of his on a nation-wide, and even a worldwide scale.

If he was a demagogue, it was as Cæsar himself had been; he reckoned in terms of force, and popular sentiment was the most powerful force of all, and therefore to be harnessed as driving power to the mighty engine of his will. It mattered not a straw to what particular brand of political principle he might transfer his allegiance; the only real principle he had at heart was this of getting things done, of undertaking the biggest jobs and putting them through—and let the results justify the means.

Such an ambition—which was typical of the new age—may perhaps have been immoral, but it was certainly not ignoble. And to a genius so clear-sighted as Chamberlain's, it led straight on, as it had led Cæsar, to the building of Empire. Chamberlain would no doubt have liked to modernize the English social system as he had the municipality of Birmingham, but he felt that to make this practical policy, he must first reconstruct the whole concern on an imperial footing. It was with this end in view that the former "Jack Cade" of red Radicalism transferred his support—or dominance—to the imperialist

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Tories, and demanded, and obtained, the Colonial Office. Once he was installed, the Empire—to use the most appropriate phrase of contemporary slang—began to hum. The country was swept with the imperialist fever; the Englishman in the street seemed quite to have forgotten his own domestic concerns; he thought, and talked, and sang, of colouring the map red; of Tommy Atkins; of the lion and his cubs—meaning the colonials; of the army that had never been, and the navy that never could be, beaten; of “Joe”—who even to those who hated him counted for more than all the other politicians put together; and above all, of the crowned symbol of Empire, the Queen Empress, Victoria.

Something more than a Queen, or at any rate a woman; resurrected as she was from her highly unpopular seclusion at Balmoral, to become a mother goddess, and to be carried round, like a venerable idol, in all the pomp and pride of imperial pageantry. Her two jubilees, in 1887 and 1897, were events of the deepest historic significance, for they served as grand spectacular triumphs of mass auto-suggestion, to the effect that every day and in every way, the great British Empire was getting more and more expansively eupeptic. The reign, the wonderful reign, had been one of continual progress in every department of life, and this was only a beginning—things were only just beginning to be speeded up to an imperial prestissimo. The most marked feature of these pageants was the almost exclusively military note they struck—a strange contrast to the Great Exhibition of peaceful industry that had been the crowning festival of the Prince Consort's England. Slouch-hatted colonials, turbaned sowars, jolly Jack Tars, interminable vistas of scarlet, blaring of brass, pom-pomming of drums, line upon line of warships at Spithead, bang-banging of salutes, God-save alternating with Soldiers-of-the-Queen and Another-little-Patch-of-Red—such are the confused impressions one retains from those now almost incredible years.

IMPERIAL FEVER

Nor was it all shouting, for the Empire had been going ahead with a vengeance. Chamberlain was only one of those empire-building Englishmen who displayed such drive and efficiency in getting things done and the goods delivered, no matter who or what stood in the way. There were the great imperial viceroys and proconsuls, men with a genius for ruling, but as benevolent despots imposing *Pax Britannica* on the subject peoples in the true imperial style, and conferring compulsory benefits for which less than no gratitude was returned. And then there was the more equivocal but not less splendid type of imperial adventurer, playing for his own hand as well as the State's, and with a liberal backing of finance capital—among them heads of great Chartered Companies, who showed that it was possible to serve Empire and Mammon, and to combine patriotism with usury. The colossal—which is the only appropriate word—personality of Cecil Rhodes, showed how money power, applied without stint or scruple, could conquer vast countries and dispossess warrior peoples.

There is this to be said for the methods of British imperialism at their most dubious. They were in every way cleaner and less shameless than those of the other competitors in the *fin de siècle* scramble for territory. No such abominations as those perpetrated by French and Belgians in the Congo territory or Germans in South-West Africa took place under the Union Jack. Scarcely one of the great British empire builders—and Rhodes himself is no exception—but was fired with a genuine idealism, a high faith in his country's imperial mission to spread the benefits of civilization, that, even when it was advertised as a highly paying proposition, was not all cant.

This too must be added, that British expansion and British imperialism by no means necessarily went together. The daughter nations—a phrase that was coming into use at this time—might find a certain satisfaction in talking of themselves as members of the great British Empire and subjects of the Queen, but always with the

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

implied understanding that they should submit to no sort of *imperium*, and that their subjection should mean no more than the "obedient servant" of a signature. They were almost aggressively assertive of their independence on every possible occasion, and even Chamberlain found that any efforts to set up a permanent imperial machinery for common action, even on the most voluntary basis, were hopeless against their nervous fear of compromising their freedom of action in any way. They would do exactly as they pleased, and when they pleased, without any "by your leave" to "Mr Mother Country". And yet, the more successfully this independence was asserted, the more effective became the invisible bond of union—call it imperial, or what you would.

And after all, if expansion was to take in peoples obviously incapable, for the nonce, of governing themselves in a civilized way, some measure of imperial compulsion could not be avoided. It was all a question of the spirit in which the thing was done. Was the imperial principle sacrosanct for its own sake, or was the *imperium* but a stepping stone on the way to liberty, a regrettable necessity to be dispensed with as soon as possible?

What was symptomatic of the imperial fever in the 'nineties, was a tendency to think in terms of power rather than of freedom. But the fever, which had been picked up abroad, was not unto death, and the temperature that had risen so sharply must sooner or later fall. And when that happened it would be time to work, in full consciousness, for the accomplishment of the great British Non-Empire, or Commonwealth of Free Nations.

The pride of Empire was fated to get so salutary a fall at the beginning of the new century as to kill for ever the sort of imperialism that had run riot in the 'nineties. It was high time, for it was by the mercy of Heaven rather than any human contrivance that it had not landed the country in irretrievable catastrophe. There were at least three occasions when the game of Colonial grab brought Britain and France to the verge of a war

IMPERIAL FEVER

that, however it had ended, would have left them both, and Europe with them, the helpless prey of Teutonic world hunger. There was even a moment when Germany itself, so long thought of as Britain's natural ally, seemed on the verge of picking a quarrel *à outrance* over the black business of the Jameson Raid.

This, in fact, was the beginning of the end of imperialism, in the true sense of the word, for England. So flagrant a scandal as that of the invasion, in time of peace, of the neighbour Republic of the Transvaal by a band of armed freebooters, mustered on British territory and incited by Cecil Rhodes, then Prime Minister of the Cape, was enough to shock the fever-dulled conscience even of those years; and when to this was added the ignominy of an almost bloodless surrender, it could not fail to start doubts as to whether John Bull had taken the right turning after all, or whether the old path of righteousness and freedom might not even now be worth seeking.

But it needed more than a passing doubt to deflect him from the course to which he was committed under the most imperialist of all his governments. These final years of the century were the most hectic, and noisiest, and most perilous of all—and there was excuse for any nation being fascinated by the drive and sympathetic genius of Chamberlain's work at the Colonial Office, and the way in which he seemed to make the whole empire come alive and glow with his own enthusiasm.

Jameson's Raid, however, had sown the seeds not only of doubt but of war. For now there were all the factors with which modern experience has made us familiar—an "unredeemed" population at least colourably British, whose very genuine grievances were magnified by incessant propaganda into those of intolerable helotage; the glittering prize of the world's greatest goldfield to add cupidity to patriotism; the humiliation of twice accepted defeat; a not too clean-handed and fanatically patriotic farmer President arming his country for dear life against the compatriots and presumed backers of Jameson.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

It was a situation that only the most Christian forbearance—if that—could have prevented from developing into one of war. Such forbearance was hardly the strong suit of an imperialist government at home, and emphatically not of the very able, and ultra-imperialist, High Commissioner Milner, who might as well have tried to hustle a hedgehog as Uncle Paul Kruger. It was perhaps as well, to avoid worse evil, that Britain, by the momentum of her own forward policy, should have projected herself, like a car without brakes, into what, with the one exception of American Independence, proved the most humiliating war in her history. The proud British army, that had expected little more than a walk-over, was repulsed at all points, in battle after battle, by greatly inferior numbers of untrained civilians. And then, when the concentrated might of the whole empire had at length succeeded in breaking up the Boer armies in the field, the struggle entered upon a weary, two years' phase in which Britain appeared in the most un-British role of a giant using his giant strength to beat down the heroic resistance of a free people, who scored all the honours of the game, and attracted all the sympathy abroad—plus not a little in Britain herself.

It was not only that the imperial power was made to appear in a humiliating, but also an odious light. The even then detested expedient of the civilian concentration camp was—and in fact had to be—brought into requisition. "Hecatombs of slaughtered babes," "methods of barbarism"—such were the terms evoked from leading members of the Opposition by the appalling statistics of infant mortality, the result not of cruelty, but of the muddle and fecklessness which a de-intellectualized upper class had imparted to its control of military proceedings, here no less than in the Crimea. It was perhaps the most healthy sign of the times that such language could be held in England, not only with impunity, but without seriously affecting the careers of its users. It did more, in the long run, for the British

IMPERIAL FEVER

cause, than the more obvious patriotism of their opponents, for, as a recent historian has pointed out,¹ it created a feeling of respect and gratitude for these men, among the Boer leaders, that made it possible, under their auspices, to keep the South African Union for the Commonwealth.

By the time peace was concluded, in the summer of 1902, the guilt was completely off the imperialist gingerbread. The country was fed to the teeth with the sort of tumult and shouting that had gone on in the 'nineties. Kipling, who was equally sick of it, and had said so in no measured terms, was—most unjustly—made a scapegoat, and degraded to the reputation of a banjo poet. But his fall from literary grace was symbolic. The sort of sentiment by which he had caught the public ear was as dead as the dodo. Never again would the music halls resound to the strains of Tommy-Tommy-Atkins, or A-little-British-army-goes-a-long-long-way. Even "Joe", though as pushful and forceful as ever, appeared to have shot his bolt. And if anything was wanted to complete the process of disillusionment, it would have been the exploitation of the South African victory by the employment on the Rand of Chinese cheap labour, the very thought of which was as infuriating to the British workman as ever it had been to the immortal Bill Nye.

An imperialist administration was doomed. Imperialism itself was plainly a spent horse, that not even the dope of a protectionist crusade, sponsored by Chamberlain, could stimulate to activity. And yet this thing that was called the Empire was in no way diminished in extent, or in strength, or in vital energy. The South African War had itself afforded wonderful proof of the way in which the daughter nations would rally to the common cause in what to them at least appeared to be a just quarrel.

The great, heterogeneous combination of peoples, races, and languages was developing a unity and soul of its own, was progressing with giant strides on and in its

¹ R. C. K. Ensor in *England, 1870-1914*.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

own way—but the way was plainly not that of any sort of empire that the world had yet seen. What sort of an empire is it that after fighting a long and bloody war to annex two Republics, calmly, within the space of seven years, not only hands them back their freedom, but allows the whole of South Africa to come together in a free union which must, of necessity, be dominated by its Boer majority, and whose first Premier is the redoubtable general who has humbled British pride in the field as has never been humbled since York Town, and who is shortly to demonstrate to an astonished world how to dispose of a Boer rebellion in as many weeks as the British took years !

CHAPTER VIII

ON TO ARMAGEDDON

There is no need to recapitulate the stages by which, in the opening years of the new century, the British Commonwealth is hurried forward, along with the rest of the civilized world, to a machine-powered Armageddon. Here we are only concerned with the vast spiritual issues at stake, and forces at work—even those of them that answer to the description of spiritual wickedness in high places, and above all to the part which the British Empire and Commonwealth has to play in the greatest tragedy on record—or the first act of it.

For now at least that part was beginning to define itself in a way it never had in the 'nineties. The principles of power politics and sacred egotism had captured the neighbour Powers and were driving them into an insane competition of expanding empires to which there could only be one end. Was Britain going to join in with the rest as one empire among many animated by the same lust for power and restrained by as few scruples? Anyone who had judged her superficially by the methods of her protagonists, official and unofficial, by the "vapour and fume and brag" that were everywhere in the ascendant, would have answered, as one of the elder Boer statesmen,¹ parodying Kipling :

"These are their gods, for they are rotten !

They have forgotten ! They have forgotten !"

And here, though in malice, is paid the profoundest possible tribute to the real nature of the British so-called Empire. The more it appears to be the same as these others, the more profound is the difference. For they are following the logical implications of their own past.

¹ State Secretary F. W. Reitz.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

These are, indeed, their gods, and the gods of their fathers. But Britain, in so far as she follows their lead, is turning her back on her past, and making that shameful conquest of herself that is not only death, but damnation. Compared with this, the danger of foreign conquest is too trivial to be regarded. Nations may survive the loss of their independence, but not that of their soul.

But the danger had been more apparent than real—there was more froth than substance in the imperialism of the 'nineties. Now that the South African crisis had been happily surmounted, John Bull, with a great deal of the conceit let out of him, could return—a sadder and wiser personage—to his normal existence. It was high time, for now danger was beginning to take shape so terrible as to give point to one of the famous phrases of the time, by which the new Liberal Premier, Campbell-Bannerman, made an incongruous bid for immortality—"enough of this foolery!"

It had been symptomatic of the unnatural state of things in the 'nineties, that British statesmen in power had been inclined to seek national salvation by entering into partnership with the great military bloc which Bismarck had succeeded in forming in the centre of Europe, on the assumption that the Prusso-German Empire was the friend, and democratic France, now in league with England's old bugbear, Russia, the enemy. It is significant that both Cecil Rhodes and Chamberlain were enthusiastic advocates of an understanding with Germany, and that on no less than two occasions Chamberlain had bent all his powers to the conclusion of an actual alliance. This conspiracy to abolish the Balance of Power, which would have allowed Prussian ambitions to mature under a British guarantee, and would have reserved to Britain the privilege granted by the Cyclops to Ulysses, of being devoured last, was wrecked at Berlin by no deep calculations of policy, but by the sheer diplomatic anarchy that had reigned, under the auspices of the neurotic Kaiser, ever since Bismarck's removal from

ON TO ARMAGEDDON

the controls. The committal of decisive power to what any competent alienist would recognize as borderline cases, was already beginning to add a fantastic terror to the madness of international anarchy. No one, not even the responsible heads of the Wilhelmstrasse, quite realized by what hidden hand their wires were being pulled. It is doubtful whether to Chamberlain himself much would have been signified by the name of Holstein.

From now onwards the menace of impending catastrophe looms more and more visibly over the European scene. It would take a great deal to convince the peace-loving and slow-moving mind of the British people that their old Teutonic kinsmen and allies could confront them with the choice between mortal combat and final surrender—but when to the world's greatest army, Germany began to add a proportionate fleet, that could have but one conceivable objective, some inkling of the real truth began to be felt.

But not, even yet, of the innermost truth of all—that this was no mere reshifting of partners in a game of power politics, but a new phase in the old war of civilizations. The same high, contending principles were at issue as in the struggle against Napoleon; for embodied in the Prusso-German Empire was the undying spirit of Roman Cæsarism, renewing its bid for universal power—or perhaps we should say the spirit of a Cæsarism more absolute and ruthless than any that Rome had attained. For in Germany the will to power was being cultivated as a philosophy of life, and ruthlessness preached as a civilized duty. Something was abroad that by British standards was the quintessence of evil—the thing to be resisted at all costs. It was, as Kipling himself was inspired to write :

“ Who stands, if England falls ?
Who dies, if England lives ? ”

Not, however, the British Empire, but the British spirit of freedom against that of empire ; *Libertas* on its

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

eternal defensive against *Imperium*, invincible, so long as it remains true to itself.

And since the beginning of the century Britain had shown unmistakable signs of quickening to a consciousness of that truth which had so long been astir within the depths of her soul. The tremendous landslide of the electorate which in the early days of 1906 reduced the long dominant Unionist party to an insignificant minority in a Liberal House of Commons, was a grand gesture of repudiation of those strange gods of imperialism who had been worshipped in the music halls of the 'nineties. Such a gesture had been made once before, when the country had repudiated Disraeli and *his* version of Empire ; but this was far more decisive and—in the main—final. Never again would there be a return to Kiplingese, nor a tendency to make heroes of such adventurers as Cecil Rhodes ; even the halfpenny press, thriving as it did on the lowest passions of its just literate readers, was fain to redraw the line at a higher level of decency than that of its pre-South African days ; and the very word “ mafficking ” was one of popular contempt for an un-British habit, happily discarded—or only to be revived in the pardonable hysteria of Armistice Day.

The German menace, when it began to take shape, had itself a sobering effect. The basest element of the old imperialism had lain in the fact that it had provided cheap excitement for a city-bred populace to whom the slaughter of a few thousand Dervishes or Boers was as jolly as a Test Match, and as harmless to everyone except the khaki gladiators hired for the purpose. The most popular and roaring song of all brazenly gloried in the fact that Old England did not compel her sons “ to military duties do ”. But those grey hulls beyond the North Sea, with their menace of invasion—taken very seriously at the time—were a different proposition altogether. Even the stunt Press did its bit to make its readers' flesh creep with the horrible horrors—for once not exaggerated—incident to German methods of conquest.

ON TO ARMAGEDDON

One does not chorus with any heartiness about one's own funeral.

These years, which seem so strangely unreal in retrospect, of the early twentieth century, were more³ and more plainly those of prologue to a catastrophe that everyone could foresee, but that no one could either imagine or prevent—rather like a nightmare from which one feels that one must wake before it reaches a conclusion. More and more openly did it appear that the nations were ranging themselves in teams for the coming Armageddon, as if it were a schoolboy pick-up. It was the logic of power politics working itself to its foreseen, suicidal conclusion. It was only a question as to whether the logic of British policy was equally committed.

To this day it is an open question, whether it would not have been Britain's better part to sever her interests completely and finally from those of Europe ; to have sought no allies except those of her own Commonwealth of Nations, and her fellow inheritors of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and, secure behind her moat and her sea power, allowed the nations of Europe, if they would, to fight each other to a standstill—as she had in all European wars of the last century, with the admittedly unfortunate exception of the Crimea.

Such a course would have been arguable—but it was certainly not the one that her own tradition demanded. Never, in the past, had Britain been able to remain permanently indifferent to what went on in Europe. So long as the other nations could be trusted to cancel each other out, then, indeed, it was—as it had been during the Thirty Years' War—in her highest interest to stand aside. But one contingency she had known, in her heart of hearts, that she dared not face. A resurrection of Rome, in a Power overwhelmingly supreme on the Continent, and above all one whose legions dominated those coasts nearest to her own, a neighbourhood that with the coming of air-power was to acquire a doubly dangerous significance—with that she had never felt her

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

island resources to be capable of coping. Some day perhaps the united force of Anglo-Saxon civilization would be capable of maintaining her inviolate as its outpost, but the unity of spirit that could ensure its entire application was not yet—nor could the “ Empire ” as yet, even if united, hope to even the odds. And the shapers of German thought, from the Kaiser downwards, made no pretence of limiting their ambitions to Europe. On the Roman analogy, that they did not hesitate to apply to their own case, England was Carthage, and as such, to be destroyed in due course according to precedent.

And even if it had been safe, would it have been worthy of Britain to have played the part of Gallio, while freedom was crushed out of Europe beneath an iron heel? The French Republic, whose conception of it was so different from her own, nevertheless had her own ideal of abstract liberty which was drawing her into a parallel, though independent, course of liberal democracy. It was asking a great deal of England that she should take upon herself the fearful risks of being involved in the undying quarrel between France and Germany—but was it not taking something more than a risk to dissociate herself from the fate of something so precious to the world as French civilization?

These considerations may not have been consciously present to the diplomatists who, when it became apparent that Germany was determined to strike an impossibly hard bargain for a British alliance, decided to end once and for all that unnatural estrangement of which Bismarck, with such Machiavellian finesse, had planted the seeds. But they were yielding to forces beyond their calculations, that were drawing the two Western Powers together into a common course of self-preservation. That a move so simple and sensible as that of neighbours getting together and eliminating the various causes of friction between them—which was all the original *Entente Cordiale* amounted to—should have set them on a path from which there was no turning back, and which

ON TO ARMAGEDDON

led to the greatest war of all time, may seem a cruel consequence of that political and spiritual anarchy into which Europe had sunk—but it was even so. With the signature on 8th April, 1904, of a series of agreements between England and France, composing their mutual differences, the die was cast.

Ten years had yet to elapse before the full price of that decision was exacted. And it would be absurd to talk as if Britain, or any of those responsible for her destinies, were pursuing a clear-eyed policy, based on essential principles and leading to a clearly envisaged goal. On the contrary, there is no time in history when purposes were more confused, and when both those in authority and the public opinion that supported them were swayed by so many conflicting purposes and desires. As far as conscious reasoning was concerned, it was plainly the case of the blind leading the blind, or of a ship without compass or rudder adrift in a tornado.

And yet it may be possible that some deep, inherited instinct was keeping her course, if not straight, at least in the true direction. For it may be that a great people, no less than a good man, may, in its dark strivings, have an inkling of the right way.

Even if the clearest consciousness had been vouchsafed, it would have required an almost superhuman greatness for Britain to have taken her stand on principle alone. Even before she had concluded the agreement with France, she had become hopelessly involved in the network of power politics. She had effected what on all hands was acknowledged to be a diplomatic masterstroke in the conclusion of an alliance with the rising Power of Japan—an arrangement for which no conceivable justification could have been pleaded except on grounds of "sacred egotism"—and short-sighted at that, for its effect was to permit this warrior and seafaring race to strike a deadly blow at European civilization by the crippling of Russia, and to establish a new centre of material and maritime expansion at the precise point

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

where it could offer the deadliest menace to the British Commonwealth.

And the Entente with France committed her more hopelessly than ever to this same skin game of egotism without principle. For France had already committed herself irrevocably to the most cynical of all alliances, that of her intransigently republican self with the Tsarist autocracy of Russia, a regime whose name had for long been a byword in all Liberal circles for reactionary tyranny without a single redeeming feature. And now that France was the friend and Germany the enemy, the next task for the unrivalled skill of Britain's diplomatic experts would be to conclude a similar unholy alliance on her own behalf with this grim regime that the effect of her Japanese treaty had been to convert into an anarchic nightmare.

Perhaps if some statesman of supreme wisdom—a modern Alfred—had been at the helm, it might have been possible for Britain to have taken her stand boldly and exclusively on her championship of freedom and—to adopt another catch phrase of the time—damned the consequences. The strength that comes from proved disinterestedness is of incalculable value. But Alfreds are not born once in a millennium, and whether a policy of doing right though the heavens fall will save one from being crushed when they do fall, is at least a moot question among practical men. And it is certain that no statesman of modern times was so possessed by the passion of honesty as the English Liberal Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey. And yet even Grey was impelled, by his patriotism, to some strange compromises with expediency.

And the fact that dominated all others—though little was said of it—was that it was not yet feasible to mobilize the forces of freedom on both sides of the Atlantic. Then, and then only, would it have been possible to say to any prospective Cæsar—and in tones not to be disregarded—“Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther!” Pending

ON TO ARMAGEDDON

that, it is hard to blame practical men, faced with a life and death struggle, for not being over particular in their choice of means—or of friends.

That excuse, for whatever it is worth, is not to be pleaded for the unprincipled recklessness that pervaded the domestic politics of this time. The overmastering unity that the continually increasing menace from abroad might have engendered on the Home Front, was conspicuous by its absence, except in the tacit agreement to keep foreign politics at least out of the party game. The great election of 1906, instead of starting a new era of Liberal idealism, was the signal for such an irresponsible faction fight as revived the worst traditions of the eighteenth century, and in which it seemed to be the sole object of the contesting parties to throw all their principles overboard and appear as their own exact antitheses.

That story it does not fall within my province to relate, or to measure degrees of cynicism between a Conservative party that openly plotted to overthrow the Constitution by inciting the Second Chamber to reject a budget, and which actually, on the brink of war, was toying with a scheme to wreck the army; and a Liberal party which, as the price of the Irish Catholics voting against their own convictions for that selfsame budget, accepted an obligation that could be honoured in no other way than by the invasion and conquest of the Protestant North-East, and did actually bring the country to the verge of the wickedest civil war in its history.

What is certain is that, in the event—whether justly or unjustly—the Conservatives, who had interests to fall back upon, achieved oblivion and a new lease of life, whereas the Liberal party, which stood or fell by its principles, had with the sale of these lost everything. It might be galvanized, but never resurrected. For how in future would it be possible to take its Liberalism seriously? And if—as I have tried to show—the very spirit of British civilization is liberal, what patriot can

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

endure to see organized liberalism in Britain sharing its eclipse in so many Continental countries, with any feelings but those of tragic concern ?

But other influences than those of the two traditional parties were beginning to play their part in the mad anarchy of factions that seemed in a fair way to anticipate enemy action by rending the country asunder from within. The principles of power politics seemed to have spread from the international to the domestic arena ; it was the struggle for survival between competing teams who were all out to win by any and every means. A class war was developing as bitter as that between rival imperialisms ; already the technique of the mass strike was being developed, with an obvious view to its culmination in the general strike ; and the propaganda that on the Continent was called Syndicalism, and in plain English was that of wrecking the industrial system in order to capture it, was already making notable progress among the rank and file.

But of all signs of the times the most revealing was the most grotesque, in the saturnalia of arson and violence conducted by the suffragettes, or feminine extremists agitating for votes, and hysterically reckless of the consequences to themselves or others.

The significant part of these and similar movements was not their goodness or badness in themselves, but the complete lack of all restraint, moral or prudential, of the team spirit they engendered. It was herd egotism run mad. It might have seemed as if the imperialist fever from which the nation was convalescent, had merely split up into a number of local affections no less malignant. Perhaps nothing less than the shock of war could have brought Britain to herself.

That time, as one looks back on it, resembles more than anything else that which on the plains of India precedes the bursting of the monsoon, when clouds darken the sky, and the atmosphere is so charged with electricity as to become almost unbearable.

ON TO ARMAGEDDON

The history of the crisis after crisis that, like claps of approaching thunder, heralded the approaching storm, is too well known to need repetition. It was, perhaps, the foreboding of the unimaginable catastrophe, that everyone dreaded and that no one knew how to avert, that helped to make men reckless of consequences and run wildly to extremes so as to make the most of life while it lasted.

These agitations were on the surface ; but it is the surface that is seen, and there was perhaps some excuse for those malignantly interested watchers who had already written off Britain as a second Carthage, confirming themselves in their belief in her degencracy, and believing that even if she were to come into a war on behalf of the now Triple Entente, her military value would be negligible ; that she would in any case be paralysed by civil war, and that the first shot would see the dissolution of an Empire that was no empire, and whose Dominions, not even having the obligation of a military alliance, would no doubt consult their own interests by leaving the Mother Country to stew in her own juice.

But there are other bonds than those of brute force and formal sovereignty, and to these the pursuers of power politics are congenitally blind. Had it been otherwise, the Germans would surely have refrained from applying the stimulus, of all others, most calculated to pull Britain, as well as Greater Britain, together. Their Great General Staff had for years been banking on a plan that involved the invasion and conquest of peaceful Belgium. Apart from the fact, recognized for ages, that Britain's very existence depended on keeping the Low Countries inviolate, the attempt to enslave this small neighbour state constituted the most flagrant conceivable outrage on those principles of freedom and international decency for which Britain, so long as her heart was sound, would continue to stand, and which were the invisible and only bonds holding her Commonwealth of nations together.

That her heart, in spite of appearance, beat as soundly

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

as ever ; that the continuity of her national tradition was unbroken, it only needed the shock of that supreme challenge to demonstrate to the world.

Not more ridiculous travesty of the obvious has ever been attempted than that which would represent British statesmanship as planning, or British opinion as supporting, a war for trade or capitalism—even if any trader or financier had been enough of a suicidal lunatic to compass it. No one who can remember 1914 will be so simple as to imagine that the wave of horror and indignation that swept across the country at the news of this avowed unheard-of wickedness—for such it seemed in days when it was still possible to believe in civilization drawing a line somewhere—was anything but genuine, or that one in a thousand of those who burned to go to the help of “ Little Belgium ” were swayed by the least consideration of trade or any other material advantage.

The power politics that had gone before, the cynicism and disillusionment that crept in during the long years of slaughter that followed, are irrelevant to the reality of this high and democratic idealism, that imparted to the war, in its opening phase, a tinge of crusading ardour, and rallied the Dominions, with unhesitating spontaneity, to the common cause. There was an overwhelming agreement that the spirit embodied in Prussia was one whose triumph would be less endurable than the utmost loss, even that of life itself.

If that was idealism, it was also, in the profoundest sense, realist. For those who were the most fully possessed by it had the truest vision of the real issue at stake, that of *Libertas* against *Imperium*, of the Commonwealth against the Empire spirit. So long, that is to say, as England fulfilled her first and great commandment of remaining true to herself.

CHAPTER IX

THE LOST PEACE

It is a tale as old as Troy that the wars of men are fought to their real decision between the gods, which is as much as to say that every contest resolves itself in the long run into one between spiritual forces. And these, in the opening phases of the Great War, were strangely mixed. With the ordinary Englishman, who had sprung to arms at the first call, it had, indeed, been a straight moral issue ; not only his country's very life, but all that she stood for, was involved in resistance to the German challenge : to the men of the Dominions who, in their thousands, freely volunteered for service in the European inferno, it was equally clear that the downfall of the British cause would be that of the free civilization by which they lived, moved, and had their being. But the British Commonwealth was only part of a team of allies that grew more heterogeneous with each fresh addition, and was impelled by such a complication of motives as to render it more than usually difficult to find an answer to the little Wilhelmines who demanded to know what they killed each other for—why, for instance, the democracies of the West should have called in the Beelzebub of Tsardom to cast out the Satan of Prussianism, or what sort of a “happy ever after” they visualized as the result of this achievement.

It needed years of the most stupid butchery ever perpetrated to afford some prospect of an anti-German victory signifying anything intelligible whatever, except in the purely negative sense of averting the all too definite decision of *Deutschland uber Alles*. It was only when the crazy fabric of Russian power had finally collapsed, and the whole might of Anglo-Saxon civilization was

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

enlisted in support of the French Republic, that it seemed as if a Western victory might be obtained on a clear issue of principle, and would represent a triumph—worth even so vast a sacrifice—of right over might. That was undoubtedly the idea of the philosopher President of the United States, whose points and principles, so carefully formulated, came to be accepted—in theory—by all parties concerned, as affording the basis for a just settlement.

Such a settlement, in fact, as would alone have satisfied the high, crusading enthusiasm that had swept England into the war, and inspired those multitudes of peaceful civilians who volunteered with such eagerness in what then seemed the holiest of causes, that of freedom and the liberties of small nations against the cruellest of all bullies. But it is the tragedy of the crusading spirit—and most of all in an age of machine-powered destructiveness—that the strain and inherent beastliness of organized slaughter are sure, if sufficiently prolonged, to degrade whatever there may have been of visionary ardour at the start, to a brute and unreasoning lust for victory, the Red Indian's desire to get his adversary helplessly lashed to the stake or—if business should be preferred to pleasure—to exploit him in bondage, to, and beyond, the limit of his resources.

Never had such an opportunity presented itself to mankind to set its house in order and lead in a new era of peace and prosperity, as to the Allied Powers, victorious beyond hope and almost beyond dream, whose leading men assembled at Paris to frame the most momentous settlement in history. And never, by common consent of victors and vanquished, who to-day are united in this, if in no other belief, was failure more tragic and complete. The victors not only completely failed to recoup themselves at the enemy's expense, but even to obtain that security for which millions of lives had been squandered—after March, 1938, they could sleep far less quietly in their beds than before August, 1914. And as for mankind at large,

THE LOST PEACE

the unclean spirit of Prussian Cæsarism was only a few years in returning to the body of a Germany swept and garnished for its reception, returning in company of other spirits incomparably more Satanic than that of the old Kaiserdom, and fraught with an even deadlier menace of world ruin.

So much has been written, and will continue to be written to the end of civilized time, about that failure and its causes, that one hesitates to add to it. But it is essential at least that we should grasp how precisely its measure is that of its departure from the principle by which the Western Allies, in consideration of the enemy laying down his arms, solemnly agreed to abide in framing the subsequent Peace Treaty. Those principles were explicitly formulated in the famous Fourteen ¹ Points of President Wilson, and refined upon in three subsequent glosses—the whole forming what may well, in times to come, rank as a second Magna Charta of Anglo-Saxon civilization. For here, purged of baser admixture, are enshrined those inherited ideals that, in the hour of supreme trial, united the British Commonwealth of Nations with the great British-born Republic in bonds stronger than those of empire.

For the President of that Republic had also, as President of a famous university, acquired a scholar's flair for the statement of essential truth, that renders him, in this at least, not unworthy to rank with the Schoolman Archbishop who framed the former Charter.

In two clauses we have the gist of all :

(1) The impartial justice meted out must involve no discrimination between those to whom we wish to be just and those to whom we do not wish to be just. It must be a justice that has no favourites. . . .

(2) What we seek is the reign of law, based upon the consent of the governed and sustained by the organized opinion of mankind.

It was not only that the conquering allies were bound by

¹ With one exception, regarding the so-called Freedom of the Seas.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

the most explicit pledge to conclude peace in this spirit ; but that the British Commonwealth, not to speak of the United States, were pledged in an even deeper sense by the *fralty* they owed to their own nature and traditions. At the end of her previous great war the British peace-makers, men like Castlereagh and Wellington, had shown that a noble impartiality could be also the sounder policy in the long run ; and that was before Britain had come to be identified with the championship of democratic freedom. It was only needful to put these principles of freedom and impartiality into practice to ensure at least a longer and far better peace than had followed the Congress of Vienna, and to do what was humanly possible towards making good the words in which the leaders of British and American civilization had crystallized the common aspiration that the war should prove to be one that had ended war, and left the world safe for democracy.

It is easy for us, judging by the sequel, to rise up and call the authors of that settlement cursed. But no human being has a right to reproach another because he has failed in the hour of his visitation to rise to a level of greatness more divine than human. It is as clear as day that if Jesus Christ had sat at the conference table among the Big Four at Paris, a very different peace might have ensued—one of happier augury for the victors no less than the vanquished. But it takes a sanguine disposition to expect a *deus ex machina* at every crisis, and a rather worse than Pharisaical one to crucify one's leaders for being as human as oneself—especially when their failure to rise to the opportunity has been pre-determined by the war-inflamed passions of the people whose servants and choice they are, and whose will they have executed only too faithfully.

Nor must we forget that if Wilson himself, or the Anglo-Saxon statesmen combined, had had a free hand in framing the peace, something incomparably better, if far from perfect, would certainly have resulted. But the principles of British civilization, even if their upholders

THE LOST PEACE

had stood true to them, would have had to come to some sort of adjustment with others with which they had little in common, the conscienceless power politics of Italy, the victory-drunken nationalism of France, the pride, cruelty, and ambition of long oppressed peoples that having freedom thrust upon them sought to use it as a cloak for tyranny.

An Anglo-Saxon alliance, conscious of its principles, and true to them under supremely great leadership, might—one dares to believe—have dominated the situation. But war, waged between whole peoples with all the power of modern machinery, produces the same sort of effect on nations as drugs on individuals. After four years of it, the European peoples had every moral sense blunted and every malignant passion in the ascendant; their very leaders had been chosen as the most intransigently combative that a rigorous selection could procure. For such men under such conditions to have acted in a spirit of serene impartiality would have required something more than a miracle.

It was thus that British civilization, having won the war, catastrophically failed to win the peace, or rather to give substance to the victory that it had won in form at the signing of the Armistice. For it was only a question of the allies honouring their own signature, to have founded a new world order based upon those principles of free association of which the British Commonwealth of Nations was the living embodiment, and to have taken the fairest chance ever offered of delivering the world from the tyranny of empire.

But the will to victory, that had sufficed for the war, was neither strong nor united enough on either side of the Atlantic for the harvesting of its fruits. And the men on whom everything depended were just lacking in that supreme quality of leadership that infects whole nations with its own faith and vision, and, as Jupiter Stator, or Stand-maker, was believed to do, can rally even a flying horde to achieve the impossible.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

Of both Wilson and Mr. Lloyd George, the nearest approach to a dictator that Britain has had since Cromwell, the verdict of history is likely to be that their greatness was of that tragic kind that just lacks completion. They were unable, in their hour of supreme trial, to maintain themselves on their own highest level.

It is the fashion to arraign Wilson for his unbending idealism, his obsession by his own principles. If only that indictment could have been sustained ! But it was when he allowed himself to come down from those heights of philosophic statesmanship to the sordid arena of party politics, that he paved the way for his repudiation by his own countrymen, and the consequent crippling of the new world order by the defection of America.

Mr. Lloyd George had a visionary genius that placed him in a class apart from his fellow statesmen ; but it was a genius conditioned by the necessities of a practical politician's career. The heroic quality that will sacrifice power and popularity, at their dazzling summit, by stiffly refusing to conform to the passion of the hour, and appealing from Demos drunk to Demos sober, is one for which the Romans had a name, but for which we should be surprised to find any exact Celtic equivalent. To oppose a drunken giant to his face is fool's play ; better humour his mood and trust to bringing him round gradually. The next thing after winning a war was to win a general election. A thumping majority and a blank cheque from the electorate, and the demagogue of the hustings could become the statesman at the conference table. But the work of the conference table was fatally compromised in advance by the commitments of the hustings. The base passions, successfully pandered to, became their own nemesis. A wise and just peace, in the true spirit of British statesmanship, would constitute a scandalous failure to deliver the goods. Where was the German wealth that was going to recoup the expenses of the war, and provide homes fit for heroes ? Where the Kaiser's head on a charger ? Was the Hun going to wriggle out of it after all ?

THE LOST PEACE

And the Lloyd Georgian majority itself, stimulated by all those private and financial interests that batten, as parasites, on the worst instincts of democracy, was there to keep the Premier up to the mark of unwisdom, and to betray the country by thwarting every effort to make British principles prevail over those of the Continental imperialism that it was Britain's age-long task to withstand.

Under these circumstances the marvel is not that Lloyd George and Wilson, each irretrievably compromised by his own lapse from greatness, failed to make the treaty the guarantee of a new world order, a perpetual peace of freedom and justice, but that they embodied in it as much as they did of those ideals that they, and their respective peoples, had in their heart of hearts. Each in his own way tried to make the best of what was plainly a desperate business, Wilson by sacrificing everything else, not excepting honour, to establishing that world-inclusive League by which all could be retrieved; Mr. Lloyd George by trying to make the Treaty serve the double purpose of appeasing the passions of the moment, and providing an instrument that could be worked for good by men of good will, after those passions had died down.

For the Treaty of Versailles was not the product of undiluted villainy that it has been the fashion, even in the victor countries, to represent it. It is doubtful whether any similar document has ever embodied so many fair intentions, or accomplished so much in the righting of ancient wrongs. Above all, as signed at Versailles, it formally bound the human species together in a Commonwealth of free peoples of which British civilization already provided a working model. If that had only stood, then truly the event of Versailles would have been the greatest and happiest that had ever happened in the history of mankind, signaling, as it would have done, the peaceful conquest of the world by British ideals, for its unspeakable good.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

But it was not to be, and the failure was the more tragic from the very nearness of success. The cup was at the lips of mankind when the waters of life were spilt. One feels that during those months between the signing of the armistice and that of the peace, a little more of wisdom and insight in high places might have made all the difference ; that if the hour had only brought forth the man, the thing would have happened and history, at the parting of the ways, have taken the right turn.

But feel as we may, we know that the men on whom all depended let slip the opportunity, and that the settlement on which so much depended settled nothing, but was the source of innumerable woes to all the peoples concerned.

And this for two main reasons. The first was in the spirit of the treaty itself. Of those two root principles formulated by Wilson, that of freedom was, indeed, honoured, to at least the extent of establishing majority rule in most national areas—though the delicate and inevitable problems concerning the liberties of alien minorities in these same areas were conveniently burked. But the other, impartiality, was flatly and shamelessly ignored. Thus far at least the ruthless spirit of French nationalism, or imperialism, was allowed free scope. Principles, points, ends, and particulars notwithstanding, not the faintest attempt was made to be merciful or fair or even decently polite to the vanquished foe. Every single issue as it arose—with the exception of plebiscites conceded in one or two areas of doubtful nationality—was not only decided against him, but most often as if with the amiable intention—in words attributed to a British minister and certainly highly popular at the time—of squeezing the orange till the pips squeaked. Even so unexceptionable an English economist as Mr. Maynard Keynes pointed out the insanity of demands that might have put any businesslike robber to the blush. But the most that Mr. Lloyd George could or would secure, was enough elasticity in the drafting to allow for the abandonment of the most preposterous clauses, if and when those

THE LOST PEACE

of the victors who had other ends in squeezing the orange than that of extracting juice could be brought to admit their impossibility.

The second cause of breakdown was the repudiation by the United States, or rather those politicians of the American Senate who had their party tit for tat to get with Wilson, of the whole treaty, including the League of Nations that might have been its redeeming element, but was now like an arch with the keystone knocked out of it, and degenerated inevitably into a society for the conservation of the *status quo*, run by its beneficiaries.

The peace, therefore, did not even set out to be one of justice, but degenerated into one of victory, enforced in the spirit of *vae victis*. In intention, and appearance, it registered the defeat and downfall of the German Empire. But perhaps some historian of the future, viewing these things in a surer perspective, may decide that in the contest of civilizations, the defeat was not German, but British, or Anglo-American. It was the spirit not of British freedom, but of Prussian Cæsarism temporarily lodged in France, that had gained the ascendant. The effect of Versailles was to Prussianize Europe beneath a veneer of freedom. And in such a Europe it was hardly conceivable that a Prussianized Germany could be prevented from achieving a terrible resurrection, least of all a Germany subjected to the extremity of suffering and humiliation, and conscious of having been the victim of shameless sharp practice. The fact that she herself, if she had been conqueror, would certainly have gone further, and done worse, was neither here nor there. As Chesterton once pointed out, when civilized men fight cannibals, they do not eat them.

That Britain, after winning the war, should have let the peace slip through her hands may perhaps rank as the most tragic failure in the whole of her history. And the blame of it is not to be transferred to her statesmen or allies, who acted according to the light vouchsafed them, but lies at her own door. She had followed strange

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

gods, and having conquered others, betrayed her own cause and denied the truth that was in her. If ever it could have been said of a whole nation that it was not itself, that description would have applied to Britain in the time immediately following the Armistice. The strain had been so fearful, the relief so immense, that it seemed at first almost impossible for the frayed nerves to be keyed up again to the task of rebuilding a shattered world. The wildest extravagances of sentiment and conduct were in vogue. In this shell-shocked atmosphere things were perpetrated which almost suggested that Britain herself had gone Prussian. Frightfulness in India, frightfulness in Ireland. . . .

It did not take long for the revulsion of feeling to set in. Almost from the first there was a rift in the alliance that widened to an impassable gulf, when it became apparent that a France, which was passing through a hysterical reversion to the Napoleonic programme of dominating Europe by means of a grand army and a tail of satellite sovereignties, proceeded to wreak her vengeance upon the body of a disarmed and unresisting Germany. France was no doubt even less herself, and more shell-shocked than England, but having suffered more terribly, and not for the first time, her bout was proportionately more severe, and her evil genius provided her with a leader, in M. Poincaré, perfectly calculated to serve and exaggerate all that was worst in her.

It is at least something to be thankful for that the liberal and democratic framework of French civilization survived this access of post-war hysteria. No military dictatorship, no Fascist or Communist tyranny was so much as seriously contemplated. But while the fit was on her, France had done everything humanly possible to ensure the coming of the Kingdom of Hell, in the form of an empire of Prussianized Germany, upon earth, in the shortest possible time. The American partner in the alliance withdrew its occupying army from the Rhine and wiped the dust of Europe off its feet; British

THE LOST PEACE

statesmen, and none more actively than Mr. Lloyd George, bent the whole influence of their country to check Poincaré's mad career, while British public opinion, thoroughly sobered by the violation even of the Versailles terms by a French invasion of Germany as shameless as that of Belgium had been in 1914, was deaf even to its stunt Press megaphones bawling "Hats off to France!"

By the time, short as it was, that it had taken France to recover her sober senses, and return to ways of comparative sanity, the mischief had been done beyond repair. The iron had entered deep into Germany's soul. The peaceful, democratic regime that had sprung up in the first revulsion from Kaiserdom had been utterly discredited. It was only natural for the average German, however peacefully inclined, to conclude that his Fatherland—in the words of one of its former Chancellors—must be either the hammer or the anvil, and that, as in the days of Frederick and Stein and Bismarck, salvation could only come by dint of a ruthless militarism. Some not very distant hour would bring forth the man capable of forging this as yet only half-conscious desire to a spear-point of action, and then let France—and mankind—look to it!

But the dragon's teeth that had been sown did not sprout all in a moment. There was a time, of about five years, from the rejection of Poincaré and his policy by a disillusioned French electorate in the spring of 1924, when it really seemed, to all but a few very far-sighted observers, as if Europe had at last entered the stage of convalescence, and British principles were about to prevail after all through an agreed and impartial settlement, in which victors and vanquished would freely co-operate, on equal terms in a Commonwealth—or League—of free nations.

For the invasion of Germany was called off, a method of painless extraction devised by which a mere fraction of the original indemnity demanded could be transferred without inconvenience to the payee, and Germany formally taken

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

into the League, with her Western frontier guaranteed. The consecration of this in a pact at Locarno was hailed as the veritable dawn of a new age. The Locarno spirit was spoken of on all hands as if it were some newly-discovered panacea for the healing of nations.

That is so recent, in most of our memories, that it seems almost unbelievable that no one should have suspected—even among those who denounced it—the real nature of this new machinery that had been set up for the purpose of securing the victors the fruits of victory, while relieving the vanquished of its burdens. And yet the whole thing, as one can see now, was an almost perfect example of that same sort of contrivance by which ingenious persons of a former age had tried to secure perpetual motion.

What had really happened was very simple. The United States, which had come so late into the War with its vast resources untapped, had been in a position to advance such enormous sums to its European allies as to lay them, for an indefinite period, under a crushing tribute, largely guaranteed by Britain, which for her part had become the creditor for twice the amount of usury due to go West, on account of her own advances to various allies. That was quite satisfactory in theory, but the fact was that Britain was the only party concerned with the remotest intention of honouring the Hebrew precept of swearing to a neighbour and disappointing him not, though it were to one's own hindrance. Though she was fully and formally determined to honour her own bond to the uttermost farthing, she had scarcely the faintest prospect of getting her own debtors to honour theirs, least of all Russia, that, having gone Communist, had promptly and gaily repudiated all the vast obligations she had incurred both to Britain and France for her own defence.

The effect of this ingenious system of inter-allied book-keeping, conducted on the principle of Uncle Sam getting everything and John Bull nothing of their respective

THE LOST PEACE

dues, would have been to have cast the burden of the war entirely on Britain's shoulders, and to have reduced her to the status of a tributary province ; in other words, to have constituted her the real loser of the war, saddled with a crushing indemnity. If, therefore, the account was to stand, and this conclusion was to be avoided, there was nothing else for it than to pass on the bill to Germany. This was a terrible come-down from the idea of making Germany recoup the costs of the war, and it really did not seem unreasonable to say that if Europe had got to pay a tribute to America, Germany, and not England, ought to make herself responsible for that part of the bill, if for nothing else.

That might suffice for the moral issue, but as a matter of business, how was Germany to foot any bill whatever, now that she had been reduced to the lowest abyss of insolvency ? How get blood out of a stone ? Nothing simpler. The circle could be closed completely by the creditor in chief advancing money, and continuing to advance it to the ultimate debtor. Then everyone would be satisfied. The wily American investor would supply capital, at higher rates of usury than he could get in his home markets, to the enterprising Teuton ; German industry and employment, thus stimulated into violent activity by continual injections of dope, would thrive beyond measure ; the debt would continue to be paid by the creditor himself, and great quantities of yellow metal to be put out of sight, but not out of mind, in the vaults of American banks ; and any little difficulty in meeting perpetually mounting obligations could be overcome by fresh advances of capital from the sanguine investor, who had only to convince himself that the system was guaranteed permanently foolproof, and that by continually inflating the bubble it was possible to perpetuate it. But once let the least pin-point of doubt prick the surface, and the whole thing would burst ; the great boom would become the record slump, involving both victor and vanquished in one common calamity.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

There had been one sensible and sane alternative, that of a general forgiveness of debts all round between nation and nation, starting the world's economic system on a clean sheet. This solution was proposed by Britain, who thereby would have had to wipe out twopence owing to her for every penny she herself owed. But on the calculation that debts owed *by* Britain were good debts, whatever debts owed *to* her might be, Uncle Sam stuck to the letter of his bond and left John Bull to collect the wherewithal as best he might from his own debtors—which meant, directly or at one remove, screwing it out of Germany. And so long as the creditor in chief continued to oblige with pounds of flesh off his own carcass, there was no particular reason for the other parties to the transaction refusing to forward them by circular tour, via Berlin and London, to their place of origin.

That may seem to be diverging from our proper subject of the British spirit and its development, but in this post-War period the affairs of the world are so intricately bound together that it is impossible to view the part played by any people except in relation to the whole design. It is the tragic irony of the situation that the great Anglo-Saxon partners, having wantonly thrown away their honest opportunity of establishing a world order based upon their own inherited principles, should have been reduced at last to pursuing the same end, by means of this new patent charlatan's wheel of perpetual prosperity.

CHAPTER X

RAGNAROK

Meanwhile, within the wide bounds of her own civilization, Britain had been quick to abjure those strange gods of the war years, and resume her own proper progress with a clearer vision and a more assured step than ever. Her tentative experiments on the lines of Prussian imperialism, that had linked the name of Amritsar with that of Louvain, and caused the combination of Black and Tan to be a mild but singularly appropriate foreshadowing of what was afterwards to be associated with Black and Brown Shirts, had caused a profound shock to British public opinion. The man in the street might not be very well informed about the exact measure of provocation, but whatever it might have been, this sort of reaction to it was a great deal more than he was prepared to stand for. An empire that *was* an empire was the last outcome of the war that he seriously desired to see ; and whether he had wanted it or not, the Dominions would sooner have dissolved partnership than have part or lot in it, or in any policy with even the suspicion of an imperialist tinge.

After the first few sporadic attempts to assert British sovereignty with the strong hand—the latest being the terrific ultimatum that, in 1924, followed the assassination of the British Sirdar in Egypt—the post-War history of the British Empire consists of one long series of attempts by Britain to relieve her shoulders of what Kipling had called the white man's burden, and instead of ruling the people with her sway, according to the Roman ideal, take every occasion of allowing, encouraging, or educating the peoples to rule themselves in their own way. To a consistent imperialist, her record is one series of gigantic betrayals.

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

The most flagrant of all, from this standpoint, was that of Ireland. The nation that had not quailed before the greatest military Power ever created was fain to "cry capevi"—as Mr. Jorrocks would have put it—to a rebellion in its most ancient and nearest dependency, conducted by what were correctly described as murder gangs. The people against whose departure England had, in the past, hardened a heart harder than Pharaoh's, were now turned completely adrift, except for a few face-saving concessions to British pride, most of which they only waited for a convenient season to repudiate. But at the same time the demand of the Irish Catholics, not only for freedom but for empire over their Protestant brethren of the north-east, was firmly and finally rejected—if only for the reason that it would have required a bloodier and costlier civil war than any even on Irish record to enforce it. It is true that on each side of the new border there were recalcitrant minorities that no drawing of boundaries could have excluded—that was unfortunately the case in every one of the states set free by the War, and so long as an anarchy of independent sovereignties was accepted as the law of nations, presented a problem for which there was no perfect solution except—as between Turkey and Greece—by an actual uprooting and exchange of populations. But for a working arrangement, the "cut" of the six North-Eastern counties was the only compromise that could have been carried, except at the bayonet's point.

Britain's loss, such as it was, resembled that of a malignant tumour. The degradation of her Parliamentary system by the presence of a disciplined bloc of Irishmen, intent only on wrecking it, was brought to an end, along with the strain and Sisyphean frustration of governing the ungovernable, with all its anti-British repercussions in the Dominions and United States. An Irelandless Britain was in every way a healthier and stronger Britain. And there was at least the chance—and to those with faith in British principles more than the chance—that

RAGNAROK

when the inflamed bitterness of ages had had time to heal, a free Ireland might turn out to be an asset, at long last, instead of a liability to British civilization.

As for the Dominions, their emancipation from anything remotely capable of being called Empire, except by courtesy, was carried to its logical extreme. Their freedom was not only asserted to the limit, but with an almost obsessive ostentation. They made it perfectly plain that such support as they might give to the Mother Country would be conditional on British policy being in strict accordance with those principles that they themselves might consider vital to the cause of their common civilization; and at the same time they refused to compromise their independence by taking any part in the shaping of an imperial policy. The British Foreign Office had, therefore, to cramp its style by confining itself to such decisions as it was hoped the Dominions might approve, which ruled out in advance any but the most peaceful and unaggressive policy, since it was certain that no Dominion would ever be induced to take part in a war of whose necessity it was not absolutely convinced.

This became apparent when Mr. Lloyd George, whose statesmanship appeared to have finally exhausted itself in the Treaty with Ireland, had, by backing a policy of fresh aggression on the Asiatic mainland, brought Britain to the very brink of war with a revived and victorious Turkey. A frantic appeal to the Dominions for support in that only too probable event, brought so mixed a response as to suggest that the first shot might have been the signal for Canada, and perhaps South Africa too, refusing to participate. Thanks, however, to the providential tact of the British general on the spot in conciliating the Türks, the danger passed away as quickly as it had arisen, and what might have split the "Empire" and set the whole East in a blaze, ended with the downfall of the great War Premier, one that, contrary to all expectation, was to be followed by no restoration to power. British statesmanship was warned, and would

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

need to steer clear of the very suspicion of warlike aims or commitments in future, for the "Dominions significantly refused to hold themselves bound by such unexceptionable guarantees as those undertaken at Locarno. Whatever Britain might do or promise in the future was strictly at her own risk and responsibility; each individual member of the Commonwealth reserved the right to judge of each case on its merits and—if it came to cannon—whether to honour or dissolve partnership.

This was made clear for all time in the series of consultations that led to the Statute of Westminster, the great Charter of Freedom in which the nature of the British Commonwealth is defined for whatever may be the term of its existence. This was not passed into law till 1931, but its principles were laid down at the Imperial Conference of 1926, which was even more fortunate than the preliminary confabulations of Magna Charta, for instead of one leading philosopher of the age, this had included two, in Balfour and General Smuts. Whether one or both of them were responsible, the result is in form and substance worthy to rank among the greatest history-making pronouncements of all time.

Here, then, is the light in which it behoves every one of their citizens to regard Great Britain and the Dominions:

"Autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate to each other in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations."

Lest there should be any doubt of the effect of these words, it is explicitly laid down that,

"Every self-governing member of the Empire is now master of its destiny. In fact, if not always in form, it is subject to no compulsion whatever."

The only apparent flaw in this pronouncement that will occur to the thoughtful reader is the continued use

RAGNAROK

of the word Empire in a document that amounts to the most unqualified conceivable repudiation of Empire and all its works. But there is a peculiarly English wisdom—though foreign critics might substitute a less complimentary term—contained in those words “in fact, but not in form”. It has never been John Bull’s way to bother about forms, provided the facts are to his liking. He has no scruple in making the best of both worlds, and keeping the Empire as he keeps the Crown, stripped of all but the shadow of its original meaning, but all the more powerful as a symbol and bond of unity, the stimulant of a far nobler than imperial pride.

Space does not admit of recording how not only in the Daughter Nations, but in all lands either owning allegiance to the British Crown, or coming within the British orbit, this same principle of free association has been honoured to an ever increasing degree, during these latter years, as if the only object of the imperial power were to produce the maximum of freedom in the shortest possible time. Nowhere has this been more conspicuously the case than in the two ancient civilizations, for which Britain has assumed the trusteeship—those of India and Egypt. And to realize this, we have only to compare the state of things at the end of the 1930’s with that at the beginning of the previous decade.

Then an intransigent and bitter nationalism had reigned triumphant. The dreadful shadow of Amritsar had clouded all prospect of a happy union between the ancient Hindu and modern British ideals; even the Mahommedan community was seething with rebelliousness against the enemies of the Kaliphate; while as for Egypt, a new patriotism was uniting all classes in the desire to throw the British bag and baggage out of the country. But now, though the nationalist spirit has been in no way damped or diminished in either land, its whole attitude to the British connection has been altered beyond recognition. In India a constitution which, though admittedly short of the extreme demands of native patriotism, is of

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

a liberality wildly inconceivable as the free gift of any other European or Asiatic suzerain, is beginning to work in a surprising atmosphere of toleration, and even goodwill. Except for a few irreconcilable extremists it is beyond serious question that Indian sentiment, throughout all its innumerable variations, is united in one solid desire to maintain the British connection, if only on the principle of Mr. Belloc's advice to juveniles :

"Always keep a hold of nurse
For fear of finding something worse."

What that something would be, for peoples bordering the Indian-Pacific Ocean, once the protecting hand of the British Raj was withdrawn, would require a great deal less than an Indian intelligence to divine.

There is something equally bad lurking only too obviously on the approaches to Egypt, now no longer tortured by the inferiority complex of a subject breed, but a flourishing kingdom, with a healthy pride in itself and its reawakening civilization, and linked in the most cordial alliance with that Power whose presence and might have come to be its sole guarantee of freedom from a tyranny beside which that of Turk or Roman or Mede would seem mild and amateur.

It is not only to these ancient, if eclipsed, civilizations that the British connection is bringing such freedom as the people are capable of receiving. It is too little realized to what extent, in the span of a generation, the whole technique of dealing with primitive or savage races has been revolutionized wherever Britain has had a free hand. The old notion of the strong, silent Empire builder disciplining the nigger for his own good (the profit of the white man was seldom mentioned in this connection), by methods resembling those of Kipling's Sergeant What's-his-name, is as dead as the dodo. The name of Lord Lugard is one as yet less celebrated than that of Cecil Rhodes in the annals of Greater Britain, but if the Commonwealth endures it is probable that it will rank

RAGNAROK

far less equivocally among those of its master builders. For it is he who, in Northern Nigeria, during the early years of the century, first created the perfect model of that system of invisible control that has been adapted to the needs of one after another Crown colony and mandate, until it has fairly established itself as the British way of educating the coloured man to take up his own proper burden.

What it amounts to is the extension to all peoples, races, and languages of Burke's great principle that a society is built on its own past, and thrives by its own continuity. No amount of gardening will ever make tropic flowers into roses, and the attempt to do so will merely kill them. Let the coloured man have freedom to evolve in his own way, and according to his own traditions. If he should desire to educate himself on the white model, place no hindrance in his way ; but do not labour superfluously to make black white. Encourage the chiefs to administer tribal society according to the time-honoured notions, though purged of its grossest evils of violence and cruelty. Let them regard the representative of the ruling power as a tactful and sympathetic friend, whose advice, though always available, is seldom obtruded. In short, let freedom always be the end and spirit of government, and if compulsion must needs be applied, let it be the minimum indispensable as a means to that end. Not Empire and Commonwealth—say rather one great Commonwealth, some of whose members have not yet come of age, and are being educated up for freedom.

That alone makes it hard to envisage handing these pupils over to a very different sort of master, to whom authority is an end in itself and the very idea of freedom anathema. It even creates certain difficulties within the Commonwealth itself where there are white communities which themselves are not educated up to British conceptions of freedom towards their own subject races. The South African Union, being dominated by the Dutch

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

tradition, though passionate in its cult of freedom, restricts it—Greek fashion—to members of the ruling breed ; for instance, there is a smouldering grievance about certain native territories fringing its borders, which the British Government, at the urgent desire of their inhabitants, persists in keeping under its own hand.

But in such a vast and heterogeneous association as that of the British Commonwealth, Empire, or whatever we choose to call it, such a thing as complete uniformity of principle is not to be looked for. In these few paragraphs it has only been possible to follow the main stream of its development, with the eddies and backwaters left out of the picture. But the current is both swift and deep, and its direction, more unmistakably than ever after the war, away from empire and towards freedom.

But meanwhile, without its bounds, the current has been flowing with torrential violence in the opposite direction. The very spirit that had cost so many million lives to lay, had begun to revive in greater strength than ever, even before the close of hostilities. If the results of war be reckoned in terms of its ultimate objectives, the Western democracies, in spite of their imposed treaty, had suffered the utmost conceivable defeat short of actual conquest. The war of partial, had prepared the way for one of complete, suicide ; the world had not been made safe for democracy or free for liberty, but ripe for conquest by a spirit so inconceivably evil, by all the old standards of civilization, that not even the worst nightmares of pre-War days could have envisaged the coming of its kingdom.

But men were slow to mark the first signs of this new, iron age that was dawning. The most momentous, as well as the most unexpected, outcome of the war, had been the collapse of the whole superstructure of Western civilization, which Peter the Great and his successors had imposed upon Russia, and the conquest of half Europe and Asia by that new regime that called itself Bolshevism. But the point of Bolshevism was at first completely missed, and it was accepted at its face value

RAGNAROK

as a form of extreme democracy—socialist doctrinaires went into voluminous raptures about what organs of the Left chose to describe as the “people’s soviets”. It was only very gradually that the plain truth began to emerge : that a new, super-Tsardom had come into being, as ruthless as that of Ivan the Terrible ; and whose doctrinaire professions counted for as much, and as little, as his of Christianity. Not by words but by fruits are modes of government to be judged, and the fruits of Bolshevism were those not only of tyranny, but of something worse than mere tyranny—a new Satanism, by which the old Christian and civilized values are deliberately reversed, and humanity itself stigmatized as a bourgeois weakness. It was no doubt the surfeit of horrors on which mankind had supped, that enabled it to take, more or less in its stride, this spectacle of Hell let loose, with all its accompaniments of massacre, martyrdom, torture, and Sadistic devilry, whose victims were numbered, literally, by the million—on the principle that you cannot make ultra-democratic omelettes without some such breaking of human eggs.

But this, at the worst, was Asia, and no more than the fulfilment of Napoleon’s prediction, that the scratching of the Russian surface would bring to light the essential Tartar. The same could be said for Turkey, the first of the defeated Powers to shake off the yoke of the victors—for the Turk had never been anything else but a Tartar, or his government anything but a tyranny ; and his new Ghazi was at least a far finer fellow, and ruled him a great deal better, than any Sultan in living memory. But Mustapha Kemal had provided, even more obviously than Russia, a working model for those nations who felt that they were getting less than their share of the world’s good things.

But this great invisible offensive gathered momentum from each successive triumph. There could be no disguising the nature of the next blow, for now it was Italy, the ancient centre and fountain-head of Western

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

culture, that made the great surrender ; Italy, which of all the victor Powers had been the most frankly selfish in its aims, and the least glorious in its military record, and which now, bilked of what it considered to be its due share of the loot, was undergoing all the bitterness of disillusionment. The hour, unfortunately, brought forth the man, in the shape of a revolutionary agitator with a flair for organization, who conceived the idea of switching over from red to black—in other words, of exploiting the national inferiority complex in order to instal himself as a tyrant of the new pattern, by a glorified application of a technique that already had its Duces in the cities of the West, and its name—gangsterdom.

Mussolini's gangs proliferated on Italian soil like germs in a body of lowered resistance. The intensive suggestion of the strange news that his countrymen were heroes and ancient Romans, was more than enough compensation for a yoke compared with which that of the Hapsburgs, in the previous century, had been mild and tolerant. The new gangsterdom functioned true to type, and with the addition of the cultivated cruelty that was the hallmark of the Russian model—for the Fascist gangs gloried in nothing so much as the extremity of their frightfulness. The leader of the Liberal opposition was beaten up and, on a second application, to death ; and even a sedulously doped public opinion was almost revolted when the chief of Mussolini's Parliamentary critics was taken for a ride, and bumped off in the palmiest Chicago style. Soon, however, there would be no question of criticism, or of any Parliament other than a parade of dictatorial nominees. The new tyranny, backed by all the resources of modern machine power, was soon highly enough organized to prevent a word being breathed or written, that by the remotest implication could be construed as lukewarm to the existing regime. It was hardly safe even to think—and thought was an activity that it was a prime object of the totalitarian technique to eliminate.

RAGNAROK

But still British opinion was, as a whole, blind to the significance of this latest portent. In some quarters there was even a tendency to admire the efficient way in which the new Cæsar set about tidying up his *imperium*, especially when increasing numbers of tourists began to return thence with pockets unpicked. The fact that he and his henchmen openly gloried in the cult of sacred egotism and beautiful war, and that in language of such unrestrained violence as to pass what had once been the recognized bounds of sanity, was discounted as merely "pretty Fanny's way". Nor was this complacency seriously shaken when words were crowned with deeds—and the Italian navy confirmed its reputation by raining shells in time of peace on the defenceless island of Corfu. John Bull was more amused than otherwise at the idea of his late ally blossoming out into a terrible fellow, and was ready to let him bawl till he burst that evil was good. Probably he didn't mean it—and even if he did . . . why bother?

Perhaps if the new spirit had penetrated no further, this complacency might have been justified. As long as the Locarno settlement stood, the nations of Europe, with Russia and Italy absorbed in stamping out the last vestiges of freedom and civilized culture within their own borders, preserved a tolerable equilibrium. But it only needed the pricking of the great bubble of war debt finance to put the whole system into liquidation, and prepare the way for a new order, or chaos, very different from that envisaged by the pundits of democracy.

The economic storm and stress that followed on the collapse of the American security market in October, 1929, did not—as at one time seemed on the cards—bring about a collapse of credit leading to universal bankruptcy in the victor countries. But it had an effect that might, in the long run, prove even more calamitous in precipitating the fall of the new German democracy, and the capture of the state machine by a gangster tyranny copied from the Italian model, but backed by the force,

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

and inspired by the spirit, of that Prussian militarism from whose menace it had been the grand object of the war to deliver the world.

Now it had come to life again in a form incomparably more sinister than its Hohenzollern embodiment. That at least had preserved the outward forms of Christian decency, and even a certain veneer of democratic freedom ; it had gloried in its tradition of German culture. About this new regime there was no such nonsense. It possessed to the utmost possible degree that note of what, by former standards, would have been sheer incredibility. The crudest pre-War sensation-monger who had described such things as occurring within less than a quarter of a century, would have been laughed out of court—though to have done justice to it would have taxed the genius of a Dante. And yet if it was Hell, it was a Hell for whose raising the democracies—and most of all France—had themselves to thank. A Germany suffering from a sense of burning wrong, humiliated beyond bearing, and reduced to such a depth of misery that she was ready to sell her soul to any dark forces capable of renewing her strength—such was the Frankenstein the militarists beyond the Rhine had succeeded in creating, and with whom they would now have to reckon as a neighbour.

The worst corruption is that of the best things ; and the earnestness, valour, and concentration of the German temperament gave the new tyranny a might answerable to its malignancy. Every feature of the Fascist model was reproduced with fantastic exaggeration. Mussolini had been economical in his eliminations ; Hitler easily surpassed all records by bumping off some hundreds of victims in a single night, himself taking an active part in the proceedings ; his emissaries performed the same office for the head of a neighbouring State ; and these and other murderers were openly canonized as saints of the new cult. Arson was no less a part of the new technique ; the firing of the Reichstag more resembles some fantastic crook story than an event of history.

RAGNAROK

As for cruelty, that, too, was cultivated with a thoroughness of which, for evil no less than for good, only the Teutonic nature is capable—when all the other arts were driven out of the country, that of torture revived and flourished like a weed in an uprooted garden. The horrors of medieval Jew-baiting were not only revived but far surpassed, for now the unhappy victims had not even the alternative of conversion.

It is hard to state these things without affronting the sound prejudice of the English mind against all forms of unqualified statement, but it is the facts themselves that are unqualified or, in the most literal sense, totalitarian.

To this, then, had the bequest of the imperial ideal brought what had once been the civilization of Europe. The logic of Cæsarism was now pushed to a naked extreme such as no Cæsar, not even Caligula or Nero, would have dared to envisage. The State was almighty ; to none of its human units was it vouchsafed so much as to think apart from it ; freedom and individuality were as the sin of treason—only one personality had the right to exist, that of the man-god in whom the whole community saw itself transfigured, and for whom it agreed to exist, as the hive for its Queen Bee. It was not necessary for such a personality to possess either genius or wisdom or virtue—with these his image could be invested to order by the state propaganda machine—even perfect sanity might be dispensed with at a pinch ; the most essential talents were those of the criminal adventurer, by which the mob can be bamboozled or rivals liquidated. Perhaps the logical completion of the process is the domination of the community by its most consummate scoundrel. Which is, after all, no more than is implied in Blake's couplet : •

“The strongest poison ever known
Came from Cæsar's laurel crown.”

The European reality had become terribly different from the dream of a world safe for democracy, or civilized

FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH PATRIOTISM

progress. Little had those whose minds had been formed amid the boundless optimism of the Victorian sunset thought that they would live to witness the progressive eclipse, or extinction, of civilization itself—or all that in their youth would have counted as such—in nation after nation, as if by some dark poison cloud, moving Westward, and already, before a fourth decade had been added to the new century, blackening out two-thirds of the prospect. For the new tyranny is marked by nothing more surely than the war to the death that it waged on every sort of culture, and on the free thought and free speech which are the very air it breathes. With obscene fury men of genius in every mode of creation have been banished, persecuted, tortured, suppressed ; in Germany, at least, not even their works have been spared. From those countries whose genius, continually renewed, gave light to the world, there now emanates not light, but rather darkness visible. The countrymen of Goethe, of Leonardo, and of Tolstoy have less than savages to contribute to the spiritual enrichment of mankind.

In a world thus rapidly degenerating into worse than barbarism—for that at least has the potentiality of freedom—British civilization stands for what may be a forlorn, but is certainly the last, hope of averting the submergence of all civilization whatever, and not inconceivably the failure of humanity itself to make good its upward progress. And in the pale of that civilization is included not only its Commonwealth of free nations and nations advancing to freedom, but the great Republic of the West that inherits and shares its traditions.

It is told in the Norse legends how, in the fullness of time, the powers of evil will unite, and how, after three years of storm and darkness, the wolf-Fenris will advance with jaws huge enough to swallow the world, while the Midgard serpent poisons the sea with his venom. In that day the gods and heroes will be summoned to do final battle against the triumph of chaos.

I have refrained from dwelling upon the complications

RAGNAROK

and cross-currents of a situation that changes from moment to moment, but in which the fundamental issues at stake stand out as clear as day in the light of history. Mankind has to choose between two ways, one of empire, which is now that of the Totalitarian Powers, the other of freedom, which is our British way, so long as Britain preserves that truth to herself which is the soul of her civilization. The choice is in the deepest sense between life and death.

INDEX

A

Aella, 22
 Afghanistan, Britain and, 335, 355, 360
 Africa, Imperialism in, 352
 Agincourt, Battle of, 114, 121, 171
 Agricola, 17
 Akbar, 160
 Akenside, Mark, 228
 Alexander the Great, 12
 Alexandria, bombardment of, 360
 Alfred the Great, 25, 27, 29-30, 40, 46-8
 Alpine race, 6
 Alva, Duke of, 170
 America, discovery of, 135; English relation to, 206-7, separation of, from Britain, 247 ff; French in, 250-1; character of British rule in, 249 ff, exclusion of European influence from, 310, and the Versailles treaty, 399, 400, and War debts, 403-4
 American Civil War, 330, and Lancashire, 342
 American Independence, War of, 253-5, results, 334
 Amritsar massacres, 405, 409
 "Anglomaniia" in France, 206, 237
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 24, 57
 Anglo-Saxon conquest, 21 ff.
 Anglo-Saxons, 21, character, 22, 26
Anti-Jacobin, the, 277
 Anti-Semitism, in 1753, 226; in Germany, 417
 Antwerp, 288
 Architecture, influence of Roman style on, 34; English Gothic, 84-5; Perpendicular, 111
 Armada, the, 162, 168-171
 Arming of English people, by Henry II, 65; under Edward III, 105
 Arminius, 139
 Army, gains control of Parliament, 195, James II's desire for a standing, 213
 Arthur, 23, 42; in legend, 68-9, 107
 Aryans, 6

Assyria, 249
 Athelstan, 48
 Athens, xii, xiii
 Augustine of Canterbury, St., 19, 24
 Austen, Jane, 292
 Australia, 305, 338, Napoleon's desire for, 335
 Austro-Prussian War, 344
 Auvergne, 14
 Avalon, 68
 Avebury, 15
 Avignon, Papal "captivity" at, 134

B

Bacon, Francis, 124, 183
 Bacon, Roger, 85
 Baker, G. P., 307
 Balance of Power, 170, 204-6, 230, 317, 380
 Balfour, A. J. (Earl), 408
 Ball, John, 112
 Balzac, H. de, 323-4
 Bannockburn, battle of, 104
 Barbarians, view of Roman civilization, 37
 Barbarization of English, in early nineteenth century, 313
 Barnet, battle of, 128
 Bastille, capture of, 269, 270
 Beaker folk, 6
 Becket, *see* Thomas
 Bede, xii, 24, 27, 34-5, 40
 Beerbohm, Sir Max, 328
 Belgium, 319, German invasion of, 389-390
 Belloc, Hilaire, 163, 189, 410
 Bengal, conquest of, 260
 Berkeley, Bishop, 228
 Bible, the English, 142-3, 153, 177
 Bishops, the Seven, 213-14
 Bismarck, O. von, 338, 343, 347-8, 355, 356-7, 360
 Black and Tans, 405
 Black Death, 112
 Black Prince, the, 106-7
 Blackstone, Sir Wm., 216-17, 258
 Blake, Wm., 6, 277, 417
 Blenheim, 206
 Blucher, Marshal, 305

"Blue blood," 93-4
 Bolingbroke, Lord, 245, 257, 349
 Bolshhevism, 412-13
Book of Common Prayer, 155
 Boswell, James, 281
 Botha, Gen., 378
 Bourgeoisie, as revolutionary factor, 327; *see also* Middle Class
 Bouvines, battle of, 106
 Boycott of England, Napoleonic, 293-4; effects of, 301
 Bracton, Henry, 78
 Bretwaldaship, 43
 Bright, John, 341
 Britain, implications of its insularity, 3, 10, 62; origin of people, 4; conquests of, 11 ff.; Edward I and unity of, 99 ff.
 Britannia, Roman province, 11
 Britons, Ancient, 15
 Brown, 229
 Bruce, Robert, 104
 Brutus of Troy, 9, 69
 Buckingham, Geo. Villiers, Duke of, 183
 Buddhist origins of British civilization, alleged, 9
 Bulgarian atrocities, 354
 Burgh, Hubert de, 83-4
 Burhs, 47
 Burke, Edmund, 253, 258, 262-3, 265, 272-7, 281, 411
 Burleigh, Lord, 163-4
 Bute, Lord, 246-7
 Byng, Admiral, 242-3
 Byron, Lord, 313

C

Cabinet government, origin of, 215
 Cade, Jack, 122, 128
 Caedmon, 26
 Caedwalla, 23, 27
 Caesar, xii, 12, 13, 15, 24
 Caesarism, Napoleonic, 287 ff.
 Calais, 101, 106, 115; Burghers of, 107, loss of, 156
 Calvin, Jean, 158
 Camden, Wm., 163
 Campbell-Bannerman, Sir Henry, 380
 Canada, federation of, 337
 Canadian revolt, 336
 Canning, George, 299, 308-311, 319
 Canossa, 55
 Cant, alleged English, 28

Canute, 40, 50
 Capynges, Wm., 131
 Cape of Good Hope, 305
 Caractacus, 23
 Caradoc, 23
 Cardinal College, 143
 Carlyle, Thos., 178, 197, 239, 324, 345, 362
 Carthage, 12, 301
 Castlereagh, Lord, 296, 302-310
 Catherine of Aragon, 147
 Cavell, Edith, ix
 Cavendish, Henry, 281
 Cavour, quoted, 163
 Celt and Saxon, 6, 8, 21, 25, 30, 41, 42
 Celtic Christianity, 31-2
 Celtic civilization, recovery after Roman withdrawal, 19
 Celts, 15
 Centralization, in Roman rule, 12-13; in French Revolution, 286
 Cerdic, 23
 Chamberlain, Joseph, 370 ff., 380
 Channel River, 14
 Charlemagne, 27, 40, 43, 62
 Charles I, 177, 182 ff., 215
 Charles II, 211
 Charles V, Emperor, 147-8
 Chatham, Wm. Pitt, Earl of, 243 ff., 252-4, 257-8, 278, 285
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 110-11
 Charter, the People's, 322
 Chesterfield, Lord, 236, 281
 Chesterton, G. K., quoted, 61, 399
 Chinese Labour, 377
 Christ Church College, 143
 Christianity, adaptation of, to Roman system, 36
 Christianization of England, 24, 31 ff.
 Church, William I and the, 55; John and the, 73 ff.; under Henry VII, 130; *see also* Roman Church
 Church of England, foundation of independent, 149-150; attitude of Stuarts to, 189
 Civil War, the English, 192 ff.
 Civilization in Britain, origins of, 9
 Civilizations, early, and river basins, 11
 Clarendon, Lord, 336
 Class mixture, 93
 Clausewitz, K. von, 329
 Clement VII, Pope, 147 ff.

INDEX

Clive, Robert, 260-2
 Cluny, 49
 Cobbett, Wm., 313
 Cobden, Richard, 341, 343
Code Napoléon, 287
 Coke, Sir Edward, 178-9
 Coleridge, S. T., 277
 Collet, John, 132
 Colonial expansion, beginnings of, 206-7
 Colonial statesmanship, British, 336
 Colston, Edward, 232
 Columbus, Christopher, 135
 de Commynes, P., 120
 Common Law, English, 78-80, 178, 216; compared with Roman Law, 79, 97; its attitude to persons, 233
 Common sense, English, 28
 Communications, in Roman Empire, 13
Communist Manifesto, 331
 Congo, 373
 Conquests of Britain, their influence, 11, 44
 Consent, Government by, 38
 Conservatism, English, 30
 Constitutional safeguards, suspension of, in Napoleonic wars, 279-280
 Continent, the, *see* Europe
 Coram, Capt., 232
 Corfu, Italians at, 415
 Coulton, G. G., quoted, 115, 120
 Counter-Reformation, 157 ff.
 Cowper, Wm., xi, 229
 Cranmer, Abp., 155
 Cretan origins of British civilization, alleged, 9
 Crimean War, 330, 332-3, 342
 Cromer, Lord, 361
 Cromwell, Oliver, 151, 193 ff., 205 ff., 314
 Cromwell, Thomas, 144, 152, 154
 Crusades, 72
 Cumberland, Duke of, 243
 Custom, in Manorial courts, 81

D

Danes, 44 ff.
 Danish attempt on England in 1085, 55
 Defoe, Daniel, 223, 226
 Denmark, German war on, 348
 Denshaw incident, 361
 Descartes, René, 236

Dickens, Charles, 66, 321, 323-4
 Dictatorship and Kingship compared, 274-5
 Diderot, D., 236
 Diocletian, 307
 Disraeli, B., 216, 336, 339, 346 ff., 364
 Divine Right, 176-7
 Doe, John, and Richard Roe, 80, 140, 179
 Dollfuss, Dr., 416
 Dover, Pharos at, 13
 Drake, Sir F., 168
 Druids, 15
 Dryden, John, quoted, 228
 Dunes, Battle of the, 201
 Dunkirk, 201
 Dunstan, St., 27
 Dutch East Indies, 305
 Dutch Empire, 249

E

East India Company, 247, 259 ff., 335
 Edmund Rich, St., 87
 Edward the Confessor, 51
 Edward I, 88 ff., 98 ff.
 Edward II, 103-4
 Edward III, 104 ff.
 Edward IV, 122
 Edward VI, 154-5
 Edwin of Northumbria, 25
 Egypt, 8; England and, 357, 360-1, 405, 409, 410
 Egyptian empire, 249
 Eifel, 14
 Elizabeth, 128, 157, 159 ff., 174
 Empire, British, foundation of, in Seven Years' War, 247; meaning of the term, 248 ff.; expansion in nineteenth century, 334 ff.
 "Empress of India," assumption of title, 351, 359
 Enclosures, 234-5
 Engels, F., 331
 England, her "fringes", 4; *see also* Britain
 English language, growth of, 109-111
 Enlightenment, the French, 236
 Ensor, R. C. K., quoted, 377
 Entente, Anglo-French, 317 ff., 327, 384 ff.
 Erasmus, 131-2, 136, 138, 143
 Essex, Earl of, 165
 Estates, and Parliament, 93

INDEX

Ethelred the Unready, 26
 Ethelwulf, 46
 Euphrates, 11
 Europe, Britain in relation to, 3,
 9-10, 11, 31, 35, 38, 133, 169-
 170, 174, 235-6, 240-1, 383-4
 European union, English attitude
 to, 170
 Expansion, Roman, limits of, 17

F

Fabius Maximus, Quintus, 160
 Fascism, 413-14
 Ferrers, Earl, 232-3
 Fertility cult, witchcraft as relic of,
 33
 Feudal system, 54, 57 ff.
 Fielding, Henry, 231
 Fisher, St. John, 154
 Fisher, H. A. L., quoted, 287
 Fitzstephen, Wm., 66-7
 Flanders, trade relations with
 England, 99, 102, 105, 108
 Fleet, English, origin of, 47
 Fleet, German, expansion of, 381
 Fortescue, Sir John, 120
 Forties, the Hungry, 329
 '45, The, 230
 Fourteen Points, the, 392 ff.
 Fox, Chas. Jas., 265, 269-270,
 284-5, 297-8
 Foxe, John, 155
 France, natural enmity between
 England and, 99, alliance with
 Scotland, 102; English wars
 with, 105 ff., 114, 137, their
 effects, 115-16, 121-2, as leader
 of European civilization, 203 ff.,
 and Seven Years' War, 241 ff.;
 Revolutionary and Napoleonic
 wars, 277 ff.; reorientation of
 relations with Britain, 317 ff.;
 versus Germany, 384, the *Entente*
 Cordiale, 384 ff.; and the Ver-
 sailles Treaty, 398, 400-1
 Francis, Sir Philip, 262
 Franciscan movement, 86
 Franco-Prussian war, 344-5
 Franco-Russian alliance, 386
 Frederick Barbarossa, 72
 Frederick the Great, 230-1, 239,
 241 ff.
 Free Trade, 330-1
 Freedom, and authority, under
 Rome, 36-7; eighteenth-century
 conception of, 223-5

424

Freedom of the Seas, 393
 Freeman, E. A., 353
 French East India Company, 259
 French in America, 250-1
 French Revolution, *see* Revolution
 Friars, Rise of the, 86
 Fringes of England, 4, 7, 19-20
 Froissart, Sir John, 107
 Froude, J. A., *see* 362
 Fyrd, the, 65

G

Gambaldi, G., 342
 Garter, institution of the, 107
 Gascony, 98-9, 101
 Gaul, 13, 17, 19
 Geneva, Lake of, 19, Protestantism
 at, 158, "International," 163,
 189
 Genoa, 297
 Geoffrev of Monmouth, 69
 George I, 221
 George II, 221, 230-1, 243
 George III, 245 ff.
 German Empire, formation of,
 343-5, after Bismarck, 357-8
 Germany, 92, 331-2; Roman law
 and, 77, and Rome, 139-140;
 Reformation in, 140, and Fred-
 erick the Great, 239; British
 relations with, 380, after Ver-
 sailles, 401 ff.; Nazi, 415 ff.
 Gibbon, Edward, 236, 281
 Gibraltar, 220, 227
 Gildas, 22, 42
 Gin, effects of introduction of, 226
 Gladstone, W. E., 330, 346 ff., 360,
 369-370
 Glastonbury, 68-9
 Godwin, Earl, 51
 Goethe, W. von, 277
 Gordon, General, 360, 368
 Gravelines, battle of, 168
 Gravitation, historical, 54
 "Great Elector," 245
 Greece, 12, 310, 318
 Greek colonial rule, 249
 Gregory VII, Pope, 55
 Grenville, Sir Richard, 172
 Grey, Sir Edward, 386
 Grisez, Pharos at, 14
 Grocyn, Wm., 132
 Grosseteste, Bp., 86-7
 Guizot, F. P. G., 328
 Gunpowder, invention of, 135
 Gunpowder Plot, 187

INDEX

H

Hadrian, 17
Hamburg, 305
Hammurabi, 249
Hampden, John, 180-1, 208
Hannibal, 301
Hanover, 305
Hapaburgs, 205
Harold, 51-3, 62
Hartley, David, 229
Hastings, Warren 261-3
Hastings, Battle of, 52
Hat the Victorian, 321
Haverfield, F., 14
Head shape among British people, 6
Hell Fire Club, 231
Hengist and Horsa, 19, 22, 24
Henrietta Maria, 192
Henry I, 56, 57
Henry II, 63 ff.
Henry III, 77, 83, 87-8, 100
Henry V, 114
Henry VI, 121
Henry VII, 124 ff.
Henry VIII, 128, 131 ff, 157
Henry of Huntingdon, quoted, 67
Hereford *Mappa Mundi*, 3, 11, 17
Heresy, Henry VIII and, 153
Heterogeneity of British people, 6
History, a practical art, xi, propagandist, xi; need of impartiality in, xii
Hitler, Adolf, 416
Hittite origin of British civilization, alleged, 9
Hogarth, Wm., 221, 222
Holland, 188-9
Holstein, 381
Holy Alliance, 307 ff, 318, 319
Holy Roman Empire, abolition of, 291
Home Rule, 369-370
Hooker, Thomas, 162
Hugo Victor, 343
Von Humboldt, F., 304
Hume, David, 236
Humour, English sense of, 29
Hundred Days, the, 296
Hundred Years' War, 105 ff, 255
Huntingdon's (Countess of) Connection, 231
Hypocrisy, alleged English, 28

I

Iberian race, 6
Ideas, propagation of, 9

Imperialism, Patriotism and, xi; *versus* Freedom, xiv, Disraelian, 350 ff, late nineteenth-century, 359 ff, Chamberlain's, 370 ff.; contrast of British and other, 379-380
Imperium and Libertas, 352, 359, 382, 390
India, 247, 259, 335-6, 409
Indian Mutiny, 330
Indus, 11
Inns of Court, 79
Inventions, eighteenth-century, 264, 270-1
Iona, 31
Ireland, 218, Britain and, xv, 4, 7; Rome and, 17, Cromwell and, 207, and Gladstone, 369, and the Liberal party, 387; post-War settlement, 406
Ireton, Henry, 196
Ironsides, 194
Islam, 46, 139
Italy, unification of, 342, Fascist conquest of, 413-15
Ivan the Terrible, 413

J

James I, 173
James II, 211 ff
Jameson Raid, 375
Japan, British Entente with, 385
Joan of Arc, St., 115
John, King, 73-6
John of Austria, Don, 157
John of the Cross, St., 157
Johnson, Samuel, ix, 219, 236
Judges, irremovability of, 216
Jury system, 64-5, 80-1
Jusces of the Peace, 96
Justinian, 78

K

Kemal, Mustapha, 413
Kent, Augustine's mission to, 24
Keynes, J. M., 398
Kingship, character of Anglo-Saxon, 40; *versus* Dictatorship, 274-5
Kipling, Rudyard, 365-8, 377, 381
Kruger, Paul, 375-6

L

La Hogue, 220
Lamb, Charles, 277
Land *versus* capital, 325, 363

INDEX

Lanfranc, 55
 Langton, Stephen, 74, 86
 Laud, William, 184, 189-190
 Law, Roman, 13, and Germany, 77; and England, 77-8; and Scotland, 176
 League of Nations, 397
 Leibnitz, G. W., 236
 Leith, 164
 Leland, John, 141
 Leo IV, Pope, 47
 Levellers, 196
 Liberal Party, Ireland and the, 369-370, 387
 Lilburne, John, 199
 Limited Liability, 326
 Limoges, massacre at, 108
 Linacre, T., 132
 List, Professor, 329
 Literature, English, 110-11, 130, 167
 Livy, xii, xiii
 Lloyd George, David, 396-7, 401, 407
 Locarno Pact, 402, 408, 415
 Locke, John, 237
 Logic, English distrust of, 28
 Lollards, 113
 London, Henry II and, 65-7; in Wars of Roses, 122; and Protestantism, 155; in Civil War, 192; power of its mob, 225
 Long bow, the, 104, 105, 176
 Long Parliament, 180, 182
 Lords, Englishmen and, 93
 Lords, House of, proposed reform, 223
 Louis XIV, 177, 203-4, 211, 213, 219, 244, 278
 Louis XVI, 276
 Louis Philippe, 320-1, 327, 331
 Low Countries, as cause of Napoleonic wars, 276, 288
 Loyalty, feudal, basis of, 57
 Lugard, Lord, 410
 Luther, Martin, 132, 138-9, 142, 146
 Lyly, John, 132

M

Macaulay, Lord, xii, 193, 250, 341
 Machine-wrecking, 314
 "Mafficking," 382
 Magna Charta, 73-6, 198, 298; its implications, 76-7

Mahdi, the, 368
 Majuba, 368
 Manchester School, its doctrines, 328
 Manor, legal status of, 81
 Mansfield, Lord, 263-4
Mappa mundi, Hereford, 3, 11, 17
 Margaret, Queen, 123
 Marlborough, Duke of, 206, 217, 219, 220
 Marlowe, C., 167
 Marston Moor, 194
 Martyrs, Protestant, 156; Catholic, 162
 Marx, Karl, 331, 339, 364
 Mary I, 155, 159
 Mary Queen of Scots, 128, 167, 168-9
 Matilda, Empress, 67
 Maynard, Serjeant, 216
 Mazdaic origin of British civilization, alleged, 9
 Mediterranean, 4, 12-13; influence of its early civilizations on Britain, 9, British naval power in, 220
 Melbourne, Lord, 94
 Memphis, 8
 Meredith, George, 342
 Merovingians, 40
 Merton, Parliament of, 77
 Metternich, 318, 327, 331
 Middle class, transformation of, 363-4
 Middle-class rule, in Victorian England, 323 ff.
 Middlesex, Earl of, 183
 Militarism and imperialism, 365-6
 Mill, J. S., 341
 Milner, Lord, 376
 Milton, John, 208, 324
 Mind, English, characteristics of, 26-7
 Minorca, 220, 242
 Minot, Laurence, 105
 Mixture of races in Britain, 6, 8
 Mob, power of, in eighteenth century, 225-6
 Moltke, 357
 Monasteries, dissolution of, 143, 152
 Monasticism, results of overgrowth of, 34; after Alfred, 49
 Money power, growth of, 180
 Money-worship, Victorian, 324
 Montesquieu, 217
 Montfort, Simon de, 86-8
 "Mooting," 38-9

INDEX

More, Sir Thomas, 93, 132, 138,
153-4
Morte d'Arthur, 130
Morton, John, 141
Mussolini, B., 414, 416
Mutiny Act, 218
"My Country, right or wrong,"
x, 369
Mystics, English, 142

N

Naples, 297
Napoleon I, 282, 286 ff.
Napoleon III, 342-4
Nation, rise of idea of, 42
National expansion, urge towards,
98
National Socialism, 416 ff
Nationalism, Economic, 329
Nature, characteristics of the
English, 25-30
Navarino, battle of, 309
Neale, J. E., 161
Nelson, Lord, 282, 297
New Model Army, 194
New Zealand, 335, 338
Newcastle, Duke of, 228, 241, 242,
246-7
Newton, Sir Isaac, 236-7
Nicholas I, 332
Nicholas II, 358
Nigeria, 411
Nile, 11
Nolumus leges Angliae mutare, 77
Nore mutiny, 279
Norman Conquest of England, 52 ff.
Normandy, English conquest of, 56;
return to France, 73
Normans, 50 ff.; character of, 50
Northumbria, 20, 27, 29, 31, 34

O

Oates, Titus, 217
Olaf, St., 45
Old Testament, xiii
Oman, C., quoted, 38
Ordericus Vitalis, 68
Oswy, 32
"Owlers," 225-6

P

Palmerston, Lord, 212, 319, 332,
335, 340, 342, 344, 351
Papacy, as successor of Roman
Empire, 20; and England, 31 ff.
Paris, Peace of, 247

Parker, Abp., 162
Parliament, de Montfort's, 88,
under Edward I, 91 ff., ex-
periment with provincial, 92-3;
separation of Houses, 95; after
the French wars, 119-120; under
the Tudors, 126-7, quarrel with
the Crown, 179 ff., after the
Civil War, 208-9, danger of
Whig domination, 223; the
Unreformed, 314
Parliaments abroad, 92
Parma, Prince of, 157
Pastons, the, 131
Patriotism, Cavell on, ix; Johnson
on, ix; False, ix; and Im-
perialism, xi, medieval, 70 ff.;
and sense of "Christendom",
71
Peasant Revolt, 112-13
Peel, Sir Robert, 330-1
Peers, prerogative of creating, pro-
posed limitation, 223
Pelham, Henry, 241
Penda, 23, 24-5
Peninsular War, 294 ff.
Peopling of England, method of, 5
Peter the Great, 413
Petition of Right, 180
Philip II of Spain, 155, 162, 166,
205, 244
Philip Augustus, 89
Philistinism, Victorian, 341
Phoenician origin of British civiliza-
tion, alleged, 9
Pilgrim Fathers, 249
Pitt, Wm., the younger, 263, 265,
270, 275 ff., 297
Pius V, St., 166
Plutocracy, realization of com-
munity of interest by, 209
Poincare, R., 400-1
Poland, partitions of, 275, 304, 311,
320
Pole, Reginald, 154
Polish Succession, War of, 227
Pollard, Professor, 91, 93, 119
Pope, Alexander, 228
Popish Plot, the, 212
Portugal, 310
Power Loom, Invention of, 264
Power Politics, of Edward I, 100-1
Prayer Book, 155
Pre-Roman Britain, unity of, 14
Printing, Invention of, 135, 142
Property, legal attitude to, in
eighteenth century, 233-4

INDEX

Protestantism, English adoption of, 149 ff., and patriotism, 153
 Prussia, rise of, 230, in Seven Years' War, 239 ff.; after Napoleon, 304, under Bismarck, 343-4
 Puritan movement, the, 188 ff
 Purity, racial, 5
 Pym, John, 92, 180, 182, 190, 194, 225

Q

Quadruple Alliance, 308
 Quincy, Josiah, 252

R

Race, Disraeli on, 349
 Racial purity and admixture in England, 5, 24
 Raleigh, Sir Walter, 165
 Redwald, 25
 Reform Act of 1867, 338-340, 346
 Reform Bill, 315, its results, 321, 326
 Reformation, 138 ff.; the English, 133 ff
 Reichstag fire, 416
 Reitz, F. W., quoted, 379
 Religion, Celtic, 15
 Remonstrance, the, 192
 Renaissance, the, 131, the English, 132
 Respectability, Victorian, 341
Revenge, 172
 Revolution, the English, 215 ff., results of, 217-18
 Revolution, the French, 238, 269 ff., effects on English life, 281-2
 Revolution, the mechanical, 271-2, and social conditions, 290
 Rhodes, Cecil, 373, 375, 380, 382
 Rhône, 19
 Richard I., 72-3
 Richard II., 112
 Richard III., 61, 123
 River-basins and Early Civilizations, 11
 Roads, Roman, 13, 18, 42
 Robert, Duke of Normandy, 56
 Robin Hood, 109
 Rollo the Ganger, 50
 Roman Church, England and the, 32 ff., 71 ff., 85-6, 113-14, 133 ff.
 Roman conquest of Britain, 13 ff., withdrawal, 18-19; results, 18-20

428

Roman Empire, meaning of the, 11 ff
 Roman peace, 15-16
 Rome, xii, xiii; influence on Britain, 11, her mission, 13
 Roses, Wars of the, 122 ff.
 Rouen, siege of, 114
 Rousseau, J. J., 258
 Royalty, English attitude to, 210
 Ruskin, John, 362
 Russia, in Seven Years' War, 247; Napoleon and, 291; Disraeli and, 353-5; and Germany, 357, post-War, 412-13
 Russo-Japanese War, 385

S

Salisbury, Lord, 183
 Saxon and Celt, *see* Celt and Saxon
 Saxons, their character, 22
 Saxony, Prussia and, 304
 Scandinavian race, 6
 Scotland, England's relation to, 4, 7, 100, Rome and, 16;
 Edward I and, 102-3, alliance with France, 102, Henry VIII and, 137; Elizabeth and, 164;
 union of Crown with England, 173, effects of Civil War on, 207, union with England, 218
 Sea power of England, 47, 289, 310
 Seine, 14, 50
 Settlement, Act of, 216
 Seven Years' War, 237, 239 ff.
 Shakespeare, Wm., 76, 127, 162, 171, 172, 178, 185, 187, 236, 283
 Shelley, P. B., 6, 271
 Sheridan, R. B., 265
 Sheriffs, 64
 Sidney, Sir P., 312
 Silbury Hill, 8
 Slave Trade, 221, 264, 299
 Slavery, Mansfield decision on, 264; suppression of, 306
 Slowness of English mentality, 26
 Slump, World, of 1929, 415
 Smuggling, 225-6
 Smuts, Gen., 408
 Snobbery, 341
 Socrates, xii
 Sole Bay, 212
 Somme, 14
 Songs, English patriotic, 222

INDEX

South Africa, 338, Union of, 378,
411-12
South African War, x, 376-7
South-West Africa, 373
Southey, R., 277
Sovereignty, limits of effective, 12
Spain, 17, 92, 106, 157-8, 160,
167, 188-9, 205, and Napoleon,
293-5
Spanish Empire, 249
Spanish Succession, War of, 227
Spencer, Herbert, 329, 341
Stamford Bridge, Battle of, 52
Standardization under Roman rule,
16
Star Chamber, 121, 182
State, Roman concept of the, 13
Steam power, industrial use of,
264
Stephen, King, 57, 63, 67, 71
Stonehenge, 15
Strafford, Thos. Wentworth, Earl
of, 184-5
Stuarts, the, 173-4; compared with
Tudors, 129, and colonies, 250
Stukeley, 168
Sudbury, Simon of, 113
Suez Canal shares purchase, 351,
353
Suffragettes, 388
Supremacy, the Royal, 149-150,
154, 157-8
Swift, Jonathan, 223
Swinburne, A. C., 342
Switzerland, 297
Syndicalism, 388

T

Tacitus, 14 n.
Tallard, Marshal, 206
Talleyrand, 304, 319
Taxation, Norman systematization
of, 62; under the Tudors, 126
Temperament, the English, 25-30
Temperley, Prof H W V., 308
Tennyson, Lord, quoted, 23, 26
Teutonic cult in the late Victorian
era, 362
Teutonic Knights, 244
Theodore of Tarsus, St., 34
Theresa, St., 157
Thirty Years' War, 239
Thomas à Becket, 66, 71-2, 86, 178
"Thorough," 183, 185
Thucydides, xii, xiii
Tigris, 11

Toleration, Edict of, 213
Tory Party, Disraeli and, 339, 350
Totalitarian countries, history in,
xii
Totalitarianism, Napoleon as fore-
runner of, 287-8, 296-7
Towns, Romano-British, 18
Towton, Battle of, 123, 128
Transportation, 336
Transvaal, 360
Treason, Feudalism and, 61,
Tudor view of, 127-8
Trent, Council of, 158
Triple Entente, 389
Troy, alleged source of British
civilization, 9
Tudor monarchy, character of,
124 ff, 137, 182; compared
with Stuarts, 129, 173
Tunis, 356
Turkey, Disraeli and, 353-5, Lloyd
George and, 407; Kemalists,
413
"Two Nations," the, 364
Tyndale, Wm., 142

U

Utopia, 138
Utrecht, Peace of, 220-1

V

Vacarius, 78
Van Tyne, C. H., quoted, 252
Venice, 216
Vergil, quoted, 13
Verona, Congress of, 311
Versailles, 203, 236, 269, 312, 326
Versailles Settlement, 392 ff.
Victoria, Queen, 372
Victorian Age, the, 320 ff
Vienna, Congress of, 303-4, 394
Vikings, 43 ff, naval and military
methods, 43-4, character, 44-5
Villeins, status of, 81
Virginia, 249
Voltaire, 224-5, 236

W

Wales, Rome and, 16, as potential
danger to England, 99, con-
quest of, 101 ff.
Wall, Hadrian's, 17
Wallace, Sir Wm., 89
Walpole, Horace, 236, 281
Walpole, Sir Robert, 221, 225-7,
316

INDEX

- War, Feudalism and, 60
 - War Debts, 402-4
 - Warbeck, Perkin, 128
 - Waterloo, battle of, 296, 303
 - Webster, Professor, 308
 - Wellington, Duke of, 292, 294, 296, 302- , 305, 315-16, 321, 325, 365
 - Wells, H. G., 138
 - Wesleys, the, 258
 - Wessex, 43, 46 ; Royal House of, 23
 - Western Empire, Collapse of, 19
 - Westminster, Statute of, 408
 - Whitby, Council of, 31
 - Wilfred, St, 31
 - William I, the Conqueror, 51 ff.
 - William II, Rufus, 56
 - William III, 50, 214 ff, 220, 308
 - William IV, 320
 - William I of Germany, 356-7
 - William II of Germany, 357 ff, 380
 - William, Prince of Orange, 166
 - William of Malmesbury, quoted, 56, 68
 - William of Occam, 85
 - Wilson, Woodrow, 392 ff.
 - Winchelsea, Abp. Robert, 90
 - Witan, the, 39
 - Witches, 33
 - Wolsey, Thomas, 137, 141, 143, 154
 - Wordsworth, W., 269, 282, 292, 299-300, 328
 - Working Class, Enfranchisement of, 338-340
 - World War, First, 391 ff.
 - Wycliffe, John, 113, 134, 142
- Y
- Yang Tse, 11
 - Young, Edward, 221, 228
 - Younger sons, 95
- Z
- Zulu Wars, 355